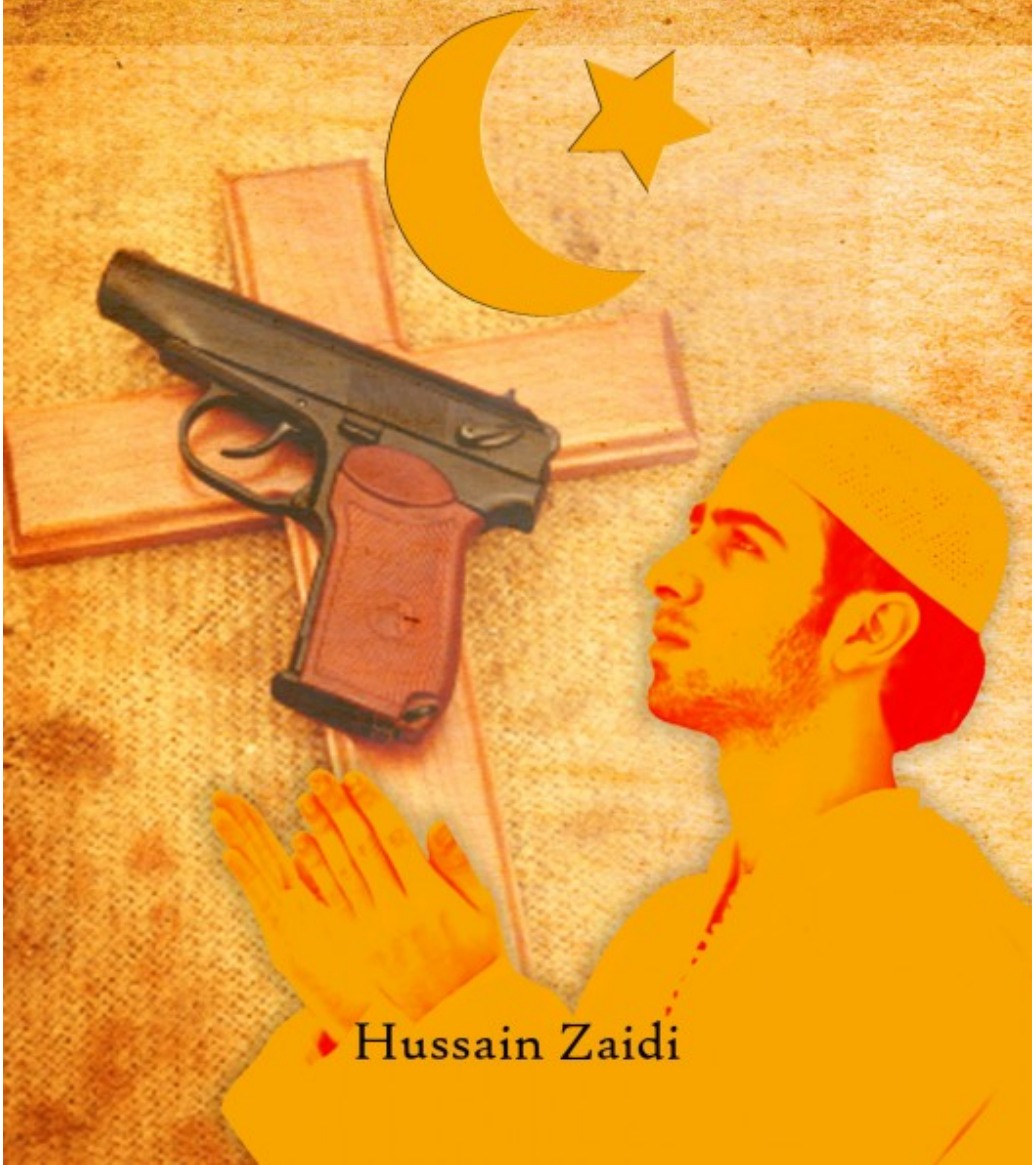
THE BLACK RAINBOW



Hussain Zaidi

The Black Rainbow

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Book 1

Chapter 1

"Why do you want to study philosophy?"

The question seemed to have hung over the table between two persons. It stood as a buffer between two men who looked different in every way. The questioner, a grey-haired, grim-faced, and focused man, was Professor Najeeb. The man on the receiving end, youthful, lanky, and confident, but a little lost in some inner abstract monologue, was Ali Naqvi.

"Well," Ali tried to focus on Professor's face, "philosophy has the widest possible panorama. It deals with the whole of human experience, the life itself, and it's a privilege to embark on such a study."

Professor Najeeb tilted his head to his left as if ducking Ali's answer. Once secure, he said softly: "But a philosopher must live before he can philosophize and as things stand at present, philosophy graduates have but slim chances of getting a decent job."

Ali's torso slightly moved forward. The tip of his right shoulder gave a slight upward start: "Yes sir you're right. But at present I'm not much concerned with finding a job but with exploring the mysteries of life and solving the riddles of existence".

"Very well if you say so", said the Professor bending backwards as if trying to assess how much his chair could stretch: "But how do you know life is a riddle and that philosophy can solve it?"

"Sir, life is a riddle because from the beginning to the end it's shrouded in uncertainties. These uncertainties arise from lack of knowledge. Philosophy can help reduce uncertainties of life by giving us increased knowledge of both ourselves and the world around us."

Professor Najeeb tugged at his earlobe. He took his tongue out for a second as if trying to find out the taste of something he had inadvertently put into his mouth. A voice came out of the depths of his stomach: "Has any philosopher solved the riddle of life?"

This was Ali's opportunity. He reclined against the back of the chair and gently answered: "Philosophers from Thales to Sartre have claimed to have accomplished the feat in their own way. But as the journey of life continues, so do its mysteries and therefore old solutions become inadequate necessitating a fresh application of the philosophical tools of analysis and

synthesis to the problems of life. For instance, today we are facing the problem of terrorism in a way and on a scale which our predecessors never did. We need a new philosophy to grapple with this problem."

Professor Najeeb did not wholly agree with Ali's replies but he appreciated the restrained spirit and confidence in which he was answering.

"Have you any question to ask?" he said to a colleague of him, who seemed more optimistic about life.

"Previously you studied English literature and history. How does philosophy relate to these disciplines?" asked Professor Ghani.

Ali, who had prepared hard for the interview, had anticipated this question.

"Literature like philosophy," he began, "is a study of life and a great work of literature, like Goethe's *Faust*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* introduces to us a philosophy of life and maybe to more than one philosophy. Men of literature have been influenced by philosophy of their time. For instance, the whole English Romantic Movement was influenced by the philosophy of David Hume, particularly his view that reason is and must be a slave to passions. Didactic poetry in particular is written under the influence of some moral philosophy. As for history, if it is to be more than a mere narration of isolated incidents, must be woven around some philosophy. The study of the past is important only if it contributes to understanding the present and predicting the future. And this is possible only if the underlying uniformity behind events apparently isolated in time and space is brought forth. In other words, philosophy of history is what really matters as opposed to mere history."

Prof Ghani put couple of other questions to Ali after which they told him that his interview was over.

That was how Ali's interview for admission to the philosophy dept of the prestigious Government College went. A few months back he had graduated from the same college with History and English literature as his major subjects. Study of these two subjects brought him to the study of philosophy and in a short time, he developed a passion for that. Now that he was aspiring to do masters, he chose philosophy.

"How was your interview?" Ali's father Hassan Naqvi, a journalist by profession commonly called by his friends Mr Naqvi, asked as they assembled for the dinner.

“Well it was ok,” replied Ali nonchalantly. “They asked routine questions, such as why I wanted to study philosophy and who was my favorite philosopher, which I answered satisfactorily I suppose. There are ten seats and only fifteen applicants and I trust I’ll be selected.”

“Well, best of luck,” Mr Naqvi remarked as he left the table.

For next few days, Ali did nothing but wait for the result. On the fifth day, he went to the college and saw his name on the list of the selected candidates posted outside the philosophy dept. In a week time, he deposited the fee and completed other admission requirements.

“**On behalf of** the faculty, I welcome you to the philosophy dept,” remarked a tall and stout Dr Junaid glancing at half a score boys and girls enrolled in the Masters of Philosophy. “You have chosen a most intriguing and exciting subject. My first and last advice to you is to nourish the habit of unceasing questioning and skepticism. Take nothing for granted except that you exist, and that too as a practical imperative. What English poet Matthew Arnold said of poetry is also true of philosophy—it is a criticism of life. And life includes everything from morality to law, the individual mind to the cultural psyche, mythology to science, fiction to fact, economic issues to metaphysical problems, historiography to contemporary affairs. And remember never consider any solution to be final. Regard every conclusion as at best tentative. In philosophy, there are no axioms, no final answers. Everything is in flux. Therefore, here our first and foremost attempt will be to inculcate and foster such a spirit in you. Any question?”

There was silence and then a tender hand surfaced.

“Yes, and please introduce yourself,” said Dr Junaid.

“Sir my name is Sara Aqeel and I want to ask whether it’s possible to live in perpetual skepticism?”

Dr Junaid pondered for a while and then replied: “No it’s neither possible nor necessary. What’s necessary as well as possible is the willingness to review our assumptions in the light of fresh evidence and new facts.”

“But sir the way we interpret facts and evidence is itself based on some assumptions—some habit, so to speak, acquired in childhood.”

Dr Junaid looking at his new student rather disapprovingly replied: “All I can say for the moment is that as students of philosophy, we must be willing to

revise our assumptions any time. Any other question?"

Ali came out of the college on tenterhooks. Sara had asked the question, which was also on his mind. He thought that intellectually it might be interesting to look at everything with the eye of a skeptic but was it really possible? "Can we not hold anything with strength of conviction? In a world where everything is in a state of flux, is it possible to have objective and abiding values? Probably I'll be able to find answer to these questions in the months to come," he thought.
When he returned home, Ali saw his mother Fatima talking to his distant cousin Farzana, who was just about his age.

"Hello Ali," Farzana said, how was your first day?"

"Well it was just an introductory day. Regular classes will start tomorrow," he told her."

"So now you have become a philosopher".

"I'm only a student of philosophy", Ali said modestly. "But what are you doing here?"

"I came here to meet Auntie Fatima. But if you don't like me here I had better leave," replied Farzana.

"No please I didn't mean it. Just talk to the mother," Ali said and went to his room."

When Ali came out, Farzana, who lived in a neighboring apartment, had gone.

"Ali you are always blunt to her," Mrs Naqvi complained to him." But despite this she does not mind coming here."

"I don't mean it and you know it," Ali replied.
That night Ali dreamed himself to be in the woods, where a lion was about to eat him. Suddenly, the lion transformed into a familiar face—that was of his father. The next moment he saw his father carry him on his wings and Ali found himself in the Philosophy Dept, where Dr Junaid was about to reveal the final truth to a bunch of animals. At that very moment, Ali felt strong pressure in his bowls. He woke up and went to the washroom. While urinating, he thought what stuff the dreams were made of.

"Is the world of dreams real in its own right or one which is reconstructed by our desires and fears? Or the illogical world of dream where all is possible

and nothing is certain is itself an objectification of our desire to break the shackles of time, space, causation and other categories of thought?" he wondered.

"**Fair is foul** and foul is fair", says William Shakespeare in *Macbeth*, and this to me should be the starting point for the study of ethics", observed Prof Najeeb as he began his lecture.

"Are moral values objective or merely relative? Do good and evil exist in their own right? Alternatively, are they merely a shadow of each other? However, the fundamental question in ethics is about good? What is good? Can it be defined at all? Before we start discussing major ethical theories from Socrates to Spinoza and Protagoras to Dewy, I want to hear your views. Who will speak first?"

"I think good is what's good for humanity at large," Naila taking the lead said.

"Ok," replied Prof Najeeb, "but your definition is a tautology. You need to define good but not in a circular way."

"Sir, I think good is happiness," said Javed. The happier the number of people, the more virtuous is the action."

"Good is a matter of personal interest," spoke Sara. "What serves my interest is good. What hinders my interest is evil. The same can be applied to a group, society, nation or country. For a people, the greatest good is to seek national aggrandizement even if that means annihilating another."

"In my view," opined Riaz, "Good is what is ordained by God; evil is what is forbidden by God. Things are not good or bad in themselves; rather their moral characteristic follows from the will of God. It's not that God wants us to do good and avoid evil but whatever God ordains is good and whatever He forbids is evil."

"All right," said Prof Najeeb. "A common element in all your definitions is the assumption that good can be defined. How many of you doubt that good can be defined?"

There was complete silence. Then spoke Ali: "Sir, if good cannot be defined, then what's the possibility of ethics or moral philosophy?

"I'm not stating that good can't be defined. I'm only hinting at this possibility," Prof Najeeb clarified. "It may be the case or may not be. And this

we have to find out. Moreover, the argument that good must have a definition because it's necessary to make the science of ethics possible is to me not a valid one."

"If we doubt that good can be defined, we can never be certain whether good exists or not. So we have to start with the assumption that good can be defined," Sara opined.

This prompted Prof Najeeb to say, "I shall not dispute your proposition but I would say that if good can't be defined it doesn't mean that it does not exist. Just as definition of a concept does not necessarily mean that something corresponding to it exists."

Of all philosophical problems, two fascinated Ali the most: one was of free will vs. determinism, while the other was of good and virtue. He often pondered over those problems: "Am I the author of actions that I perform? Am I free to choose the ends that I seek? Is my freedom merely an illusion and everything is pre-determined? Does determinism have a purpose or is it purposeless? Is there a cosmic mind that has planned everything and all events are merely unfolding of the great divine drama, whose script has eternally been written? Or is determinism merely mechanistic with no plan and no purpose, no rhyme and no reason, no meaning and no method?"

To Ali, the answer to all philosophical, political and economic problems depended on how one answered those questions. If freedom was simply an illusion, how could a man be held responsible for his actions? The same applied to societies and nations. For if freedom was an illusion and everything was preordained or determined, nations and societies were as helpless in shaping their future as individuals were. Rise and fall, victory and defeat, progress and regression, development and decadence, glory and humiliation, all were part of an eternally written script. The tyrant was as helpless as the oppressed, the master as helpless as the slave. So why to glorify one and condemn the other, extol the one and denounce the other? Was there a divine plan governing the fate of the nations and individuals? Were some of them chosen to spearhead the implementation of that plan? And what was that divine plan? Divine comedy? Victory of good over evil? Unfolding of the divine will beyond any ethical considerations?

In such a plan, how and where did human aspirations fit in? Were prayers and petitions, wishes and supplications, a futile exercise? Closely connected with that was the question of good and evil. Was good merely a realization of our desires and evil their non-fulfillment? Did good and evil exist in an objective sense or did they owe themselves to the subjective impressions of the individual? What was the relationship between virtue and knowledge? Could

good be identified with rational, intelligent action? Or was reason and intelligence a mere slave of passions, which made the individual pursue his own interest only independent of its consequences for others?

In the Philosophy Department, there was a lot of discussion on those issues and everyone answered them in their own way. But Ali was unable to make up his mind and his thought oscillated between varying views. One thing Ali did not know that the answer to those questions was not merely an academic exercise but would also bear upon his life.

The intellectual uncertainty was matched by emotional indecisiveness. Ali was unable to define his relationship with Farzana. He knew he felt an irresistible attraction towards her despite his efforts to be indifferent to her overtures. But whether that attraction verged on love or was merely an animal drive, he didn't know.

He even did not know whether he would be able to transcend his skepticism and establish serious emotional relationship with any woman. Indeed he considered wife and children a costly distraction. Bacon's remark that one who married and had wife and children had given himself hostage to fortune often echoed in him. "Is marriage a necessity or a luxury? Is marriage merely a means of sexual gratification or a means to permanent companionship?"

Ali often tried to suppress his sexual impulse but in vain. It often happened that while reading a book, Farzana's face would appear on the page and wouldn't disappear despite best of his efforts. Then he would go into a fantasy having her in his arms. He would feel a strong desire to have her before him and make love to her. Very often Farzana would actually appear at that moment and Ali was at a loss what to do.

"**Good morning," said** Mrs Naqvi, as she put the cup of tea on the side table.

"Good morning", replied Ali. "Where's father?"

"He's taking shower," she replied.

"Isn't it his weekly off today?" Ali asked.

"Not today, I'm afraid. The prime minister is speaking to the press and your father has to cover the event."

"Ok I'm coming in five minutes," said Ali as he finished his tea.

“Good morning father. Mother told me you are to cover a VVIP event.”

“Yes, the PM will announce the government’s policy on terrorism today,” replied Mr Naqvi.
“Do you expect anything special?” Ali asked.

“Not really.” There’s no option for the government but to go all out against terrorists and extremists. Hence, the premier’s announcement will be more or less a formal statement of what the government is already doing.”

“Father, forgive me, but do you really think we can win this war on terror? Should we not engage the militants and thrash the matter out? After all they are our own people; misguided souls though they may be.”

“Well son, the government in the past has tried to engage them but without success. These people are not amenable to reason. I have personally interviewed some of their leaders and the message was loud and clear: that it is a war between Islam and *kufr* and they’ll not set at rest unless they win.”

“But they are partly right. We are fighting America’s war. Aren’t we?”

“No, I’m afraid this popular perception isn’t correct. It might be America’s war to begin with but now it’s our own as our people are being killed and our assets destroyed. While Americans are safe in their country, our people are in the line of fire.”

“But father, can a nation win by conquering its own people. When the victorious and the vanquished are the same people, success becomes meaningless.”

“Your question is interesting,” Mr Naqvi responded, “but I’m afraid I have to hurry. So we leave the discussion here.”

Terrorism and the war against it was the question which agitated the mind of every Pakistani man and woman, young and old. The country was in the grip of terrorism of the worst kind. Hardly a day passed when a suicide blast did not occur. While every one was alive to the repercussions of the menace, opinion was divided as to who was responsible for the malady and how it was to be treated.

There were people who believed that the war on terror was essentially America’s war and that Pakistan was being used merely as a pawn on the chessboard of America’s counter-terrorism strategy. These people would call

upon the government to quit the American alliance, announce a unilateral ceasefire with the militants and initiate a dialogue with them even if it were on their terms. Then there were people, like Mr Naqvi, who were of the view that the war on terror was very much Pakistan's own war as it was being waged on Pakistan's soil and it was Pakistanis who were being targeted. Therefore, the war should be taken to its logical conclusion. These people weren't against a dialogue with the militants but only with those who laid down their arms.

Having taken breakfast, Ali switched on the TV. During the last few years, the government had allowed private TV channels to go on air and at present some three dozen of them were operating. Most of them were news channels, which fully exploited the volatile situation in the country.

By the afternoon, most of the channels were telecasting the prime minister's press conference live. As Mr Naqvi had hinted at, the PM announced to wipe out terrorism and ruled out any compromise with terrorists unless they surrendered. "Either we or they", was his concluding remark.

Chapter 2

Dr Junaid parked his car in the vast compound of a villa on the outskirts of the city and walked towards the entrance. The armed security guards standing at the entrance saluted him.

"Hello," said Dr Junaid to the young beautiful woman named Rubina, who was there to receive him. "Is Zia sahib in?"

"Yes sir," Rubina replied with a professional smile.

Dr Junaid gently knocked at the door on the left and without waiting for an answer entered the room. He was received by a tall, bearded man in his 50s wearing colored glasses.

"*Assalam-o-alaikum*! Brother, how are you?" Maulvi Zia asked Dr Junaid.

"By the grace of Allah I am fine," he replied.

Zia mentioned him to a sofa in the exquisitely furnished spacious room.

"How was your stay abroad?" Dr Junaid asked Zia.

"Very comfortable and equally rewarding," he replied in a powerful voice. "In the circles I moved," Zia continued, "I found a lot of support for our noble cause in terms of both men and matter and God willing the support will get stronger and stronger. But how are your new recruits? Any potential soldiers for our army?"

"Well it's too early to say. I have yet to get myself familiar with them. Presently they are being given doses of skepticism," said Dr Junaid in an off-hand manner.

"Faith is the only effective antidote to doubt," said Maulvi Zia with a sinister smile, "Let's have something to drink." In a few moments, Rubina entered with a bottle of wine and glasses.

"Alcohol is an equally effective antidote to all our doubts," said Dr Junaid as he sipped his drink.

"And beauty as well," added Zia, as he threw a glance at Rubina's big breasts. Then laughter broke out. Rubina was first to laugh.

Mr Naqvi was a seasoned journalist, who commanded respect of his colleagues for his professionalism and personal integrity. He worked with a prestigious media group and was credited with covering several important events and filing many investigating stories. Presently, he was assigned political beat and covered VVIP activities.

Mr Naqvi believed that a journalist shouldn't be affiliated with any political party or any religious or ethnic outfit and report and analyze events with utmost objectivity transcending his personal preferences and biases—a belief that he had practiced as conscientiously as possible but for which he had paid considerable price. Many of his colleagues had obtained substantial monetary and other benefits by serving political and ethnic interests. But Mr Naqvi was content with what he had and took pride in his work.

One afternoon, he was summoned by his editor. "You know Hassan the prime minister announced the anti-terrorism policy a few days back and in fact you covered the event for us."

The editor paused for a moment and then continued, "Can you do a detailed story for our monthly magazine on the new policy incorporating views of the leading political and religious parties as well those of human right organizations?"

"Yes, why not. I was also thinking on these lines," said Mr Naqvi.

"Ok, then please go ahead. As usual, pending the completion of the story, you wouldn't be required to cover routine activities," said the editor.

"Thanks," said Mr Naqvi and took leave of the editor.

Mr Naqvi had the habit of sharing his professional engagements with his family. Therefore, he told his wife and Ali about his new assignment.

"Do you think the government's policy on terrorism will succeed?" Mrs Naqvi asked her husband.

"Well, it's too early to say but the fact that the government has a clear-cut policy on the problem in itself is a welcome development."

"Father, is the government capable of carrying out the policy?" Ali asked.

"There are certain constraints within which the government is working and these also apply to the war against terror," Mr Naqvi replied vaguely.

"And what are those constraints?" asked Mrs Naqvi, who was religiously interested in all that her husband did.

"The biggest constraint is the economy. The government will have to commit tremendous resources at a time when the economy is already in a bad shape. The other constraint is political as some of the government's allies as well as opposition parties don't see eye to eye with it on how to handle the situation," Mr Naqvi explained.

"But aren't the armed forces behind the government?" Ali enquired.

"The army is never behind a government unless it's their own. They have their own agenda. But you're right. On the war on terror, they are at one with the govt. Now, you'll excuse me as I have some work to do."

Mr Naqvi made a list of political and religious figures he was supposed to interview. Though personally he was in full support of the efforts to stamp out terrorism, professionalism dictated that he reached out to a cross-section of society.

Most of the persons he interviewed expressed their disagreement with the argument that force was the solution to terrorism and stressed the need for a dialogue with militant outfits without any preconditions. Some of the religious leaders went to the extent of eulogizing the militants for fighting the war of Islam.

Mr Naqvi had almost completed his write-up when he received an e-mail message from a *jihadi* organization called Al Fateh inviting him to interview their supreme commander. Mr Naqvi had in the past interviewed many militant organizations so he accepted the offer and at the appointed hour reported at a pre-designated place. From there he was taken blind folded in a jeep to an unknown place after a few hours' drive. When the blind was removed, he found himself in a small windowless room with scarcely any furniture except a rugged carpet. He was asked to wait and after quarter of an hour, entered the supremo of Al Fateh surrounded by four gun-totting guards.

"*Assalam-o-Alaikum*," the supremo welcomed Mr Naqvi. "Thank you for coming here. I'm sorry for the manner you were brought here. But I hope you understand the problems we face," he began as he himself seated on the carpet and also mentioned Mr Naqvi to sit.

"No problem," Mr Naqvi replied politely.

"I was told you're doing a story on militancy and I think it in order to express the views of my organization," the supremo said in a sharp tone."

"I thank you for this opportunity. Since your organization is a major player on the scene, your views on the subject are welcome."

"You're our guest and our culture dictates us to extend you warm hospitality. So have tea and some dry fruit with us before we talk," the supremo said.

After the light refreshment was over, Mr Naqvi switched on his small cassette player and started the interview.

"Why are you fighting this war?" he put the first question.

"This war has been imposed on us by this government, which is a stooge of western infidels. This country was created in the name of Islam but unfortunately it slipped into the hands of the forces of secularism and liberalism. However, the people want the supremacy of Islamic values and enforcement of the Islamic system. Our only fault, if you call it so, was to enforce the Islamic system in this part of the country. We created law and order in a place where government writ had hardly existed ever before. We gave security and justice to the people, which they had never before and ensured honor and dignity to the women. But the government instead of appreciating our work declared war on us. But you'll agree that everyone has the right to self-defense. So we are merely exercising this right. Does this make us outlaws?" The supremo spoke in a voice brimming with emotions and self-assurance.

"It is alleged that you forcibly enforced what you call the Islamic system here," Mr Naqvi asked.

The supremo shaking his head replied: "The Islamic system was a long-standing demand of the people, because only this system can ensure justice and peace. You know, most of us were poor, landless people. Under the Islamic system, the land was equitably distributed among the people. The West, which you people try to emulate, believes in democracy. I ask you what is democracy but a government based on the consent of the people and which works for their welfare and salvation. But when we tried to establish such a system, we were branded as extremists, terrorists, traitors and what not!"

"In the West," said Mr Naqvi, "the will and consent of the people is ascertained through fair and free elections. I wonder you have had such an exercise here?

“There are various ways of ascertaining the popular will. Ballot is only one of them. Moreover, I am talking about the spirit of democracy and not its form. Anyway, Islam has its own view of democracy based on divine rather than popular sovereignty. In an Islamic state, divine law reigns supreme and we don’t need a referendum or election to decide this.”

“The debate on what’s Islamic and what’s western democracy is interesting but never ending. Let’s move from conceptual discussion. It is alleged that you want to establish the Islamic system all over the country by force if that be,” Mr Naqvi posed another question.

“We wish Islam reign supreme all over the world. But force is not our weapon. We resort to force only when pushed to the wall,” the supremo replied keeping his cool.

“How do you justify suicide terrorism when killing is forbidden in Islam?

“In Islam, in unavoidable circumstances, *haram* becomes *halal* and *halal* becomes *haram*. We are facing such circumstances. We are fighting an army much greater in strength and far better equipped. We can’t beat them in traditional warfare. Suicide blasts are our most effective weapon. It’s our atomic bomb, you may call it.”

“But innocent lives are lost in such attacks,” Mr Naqvi asked.

“I feel extremely really sorry for these people,” answered the supremo, “who are not our targets. But since it’s difficult to hit people in high places we have to kill ordinary people to create panic in the ranks of the government and society. I said I feel sorry for the people killed in blasts. But we also consider them fortunate, because their blood will contribute to the success of Islam over the forces of evil. In the West, they say, the blood of the martyr is the seed of the revolution. By the grace of Allah, the sacrifices of these people will not go in vain. And why do we make much of innocent people being killed in suicide attacks? Innocent people are also killed in drone strikes and no one speaks against them and the casualties are simply dismissed as collateral damage. Why these double standards?”

“I myself don’t approve of the drone strikes. Anyway, how do you see the counter militancy policy of the government?

“The policy is doomed to failure. The government cannot crush our will, because God in the heavens and people on the earth are with us. So sooner or later, the government will be forced to negotiate with us.”

“So you’re prepared to negotiate?” asked Mr Naqvi

“Yes, but without preconditions, such as laying down arms.

“In negotiations, each side has to make some concessions. What concessions you’re going to make?”

“Short of Islamisation, any concession can be considered depending on the seriousness and earnestness on the other side,” replied the supremo.

Mr Naqvi (turning off his cassette player) said, “A final off the record question: You seem to be quite an educated person.”

“Don’t regard militants as savages.”

Mr Naqvi’s story on terrorism was highly appreciated for its objective presentation and acute analysis of a highly controversial issue. That afternoon he was sitting in his office when he received a call from one Jamshed, who introduced himself to be an official of a spy agency and sought an appointment with him. It was agreed that they would meet in the National Park the same evening.

As Mr Naqvi came out of his car, he was received by a tall, well-built man in his early forties. “Thanks for coming,” said Jamshed.

“My pleasure, replied Mr Naqvi. “You told me you wanted to speak about my story?

“It’s about your interview with the leader of Al-Fateh. Can you tell me where and how you met him?” he asked

Mr Naqvi gave an account of how he was contacted by the organization but expressed his inability to identify the place of the meeting.

The spy suspecting that Mr Naqvi was concealing some important information said, “But your story betrays you have a lot of sympathy for the militants. You know how dangerous these people are.”

Mr Naqvi said somewhat indigently, “If that is the impression then I feel sorry for that. I presented what I saw and heard. I couldn’t suppress the facts of the interview; it’s for the readers to draw their own conclusions.”

Jamshed didn’t like the answer and said, “In future, if any such organization

contacts you, we expect that you would inform us immediately."

"Certainly not," Naqvi replied with the bluntness of a general. "I'm under no such obligation. If you want to hunt down these people, do that on your own. Don't think for a moment that you can set me up to catch your targets."

"If you don't cooperate with us, you may land yourself and your family into trouble," the spy sounded a note of warning. "And for your kind information, many of your colleagues are cooperating with us."

"Thanks for your warning", Mr Naqvi said. "As for my colleagues, they are responsible for what they do. If we have nothing else to talk then I shall take your leave."

Mr Naqvi left the scene in indignation. When he returned home, Mrs Naqvi red his face and realized that something bad had happened,

Mr Naqvi, who would never conceal anything from his wife, told her about his encounter with the spy Jamshed.

"You should," she said, "not be afraid of such threats. Just concentrate on your work.

"I'm concerned about you and Ali."

"God willing, nothing will happen to us.

"Thanks, your words have lightened me."

"**The meeting has** been called," began the prime minister glancing at the participants, "to take stock of the current situation. Terrorism is on the rise and as per our policy we need to step up fight against terror. Reports are that the militants will retaliate by targeting key government figures and installations. So what are our plans?" he looked at the interior minister sitting on his right.

"Well, prime minister," said the interior minister, "we are beefing up security and I have already instructed the agencies to take special care of VVIPs and important diplomatic missions. My ministry has prepared a presentation on the security plan, which with your kind permission will follow shortly."

"Increased security is important but not sufficient," the prime minister's special advisor, a veteran politician, observed. "We need to enlist the support

of the people at large and this will not be coming through unless they feel themselves threatened by the terrorists. People should understand that militancy is a threat not only to the government but to the whole society."

"We are already putting across that message to the people through mass media," interrupted the young Harvard educated information minister, who had recently entered into politics after the death of his father.

"My younger colleague," returned the old advisor, "propaganda alone will not accomplish that. Much more will have to be done by acts of omission and commission." He uttered the last three words with a meaningful smile.

"Jehangir sahib," said the prime minister, "we hold your experience in the highest esteem and I'm sure you have something important to tell us."

"Prime minister," the advisor said bluntly, "we should let ordinary people be hit by the militants. And if they do not do so, our agencies should provide them an opportunity to so and then shift the blame on the militants."

For a few seconds there was complete silence in the conference room and then a number of ministers began to speak together.

"Order please," the PM intervened. "Don't turn this meeting into a session of parliament. I already had too much of that earlier in the day."

"But how come such a proposal be made!" exclaimed the information minister.

"Letting our people be killed will be detestable," remarked the defense minister.

"We might be put under UN sanctions for that," warned the foreign minister, who had retuned only a day before after attending the meeting of the Human Rights Commission in New York.

All along, the advisor kept smiling. "My younger colleagues have probably misunderstood me," he said with the calmness of a stoic. "You know how much the people hate our government, and this is despite your forceful media campaign," he said sarcastically looking deeply into the information minister. "A large number of people think we are fighting the war of the West. We need to dispel that impression. We are already being condemned for failure to stop drone attacks."

"But is it not our own war?" asked a young woman minister better known for

her charms.

"Yes it's," replied the advisor, "but many think it's otherwise. If it's my war, I shall be the target of militants. While I may forgive them for killing my neighbor, I'll never forgive them for killing my son."

"But aren't the people already being killed?" asked another minister.

"Yes they are but not in that large number."

"But how will our western allies react to that?" asked the foreign minister.

"They are not interested in the safety of our people but theirs. You know since the 9/11 not a single terrorist incident has taken place in America but hundreds have occurred on our soil. If we want to win this war, we need to make more sacrifices. And of course when I say more sacrifices I mean the people, not the govt."

The PM, winding up the discussion said, "Let me think over this intriguing proposal. For the moment, we take the interior ministry's presentation."

Maulvi Zia cut the ribbon, which was followed by loud applause. "This occasion," he started, "calls for celebration as our new seminary has been completed in record time courtesy generous grants by our well wishers, friends and patrons. These days propaganda against *madaris* has been stepped up. Our opponents allege that the *madaris* are the breeding ground of terrorism. Nothing can be farther from the truth. The *madaris* are a place of learning and provide totally free education as well as free lodging. The education and training imparted in the madaris fully caters to the moral development of the students. They also cater to the needs of poor students who cannot afford education in mainstream institutions. Religious seminaries exist in the western Christian world as well, but no one points a finger at them. Why then our *madaris* are targeted? The critics of *madaris* are the enemies of Islam. My message to you is to keep aloft the values of Islam and be prepared to render any sacrifice." With this he concluded his sermon.

After the inaugural ceremony was over and cameras removed, Zia went to his office along with the management of the seminary. Speaking to them he said, "I want this seminary to be developed into a centre of excellence for religious education and militancy. Make the students the real soldiers of Islam. Don't bother about resources; we have plenty of them."

"Zia sahib," said the principal of the seminary, "the government will be

closely watching the activities of the *madaris*, so we need to be tremendously careful about what we do."

"Oh, the government!" Zia said contemptuously, "they have been claiming all along to regulate the *madaris*. Have they been able to do so? The government itself is not serious in its resolve and is doing this merely as a political stunt. The authorities know well what's happening in the *madaris* but they only wink at it. The government in fact is afraid of us because they know nothing is easier than to incite the people in the name of religion. As for the present government, religious parties are their allies and they need our support to remain in the saddle. Besides, our patrons will safeguard our interest come what may."

"Zia sahib your political wisdom is unquestionable. Whatever doubts we had have been removed. We'll continue our activities with the same force," assured the principal.

"Thanks. I'm afraid I have to appear in a TV talk show on inter-faith harmony. In case you have any problems do let me know. "*Allah hafiz*," Zia said and surrounded by guards made his way to the four-wheeler.

"**What is the** basic problem in our society?" asked Prof. Ghani at the start of the seminar on social relevance of philosophy.

"It's lack of rule of law," began Naila. "Lawlessness is the cancer of body politic; if left untreated, it plays havoc with that. It's not stern laws that destroy a society but their discriminatory application. In our country, the law exists but it doesn't reign supreme. The high and mighty, the rich and wealthy get away with most blatant violation of law, while the ordinary people are penalized for even minor, harmless offences."

"You're right Ms Naila, said Prof Ghani. "Lack of rule of law is a major malaise of our society. But it may not be the major one."
"Sir, to me the basic problem of our society is illiteracy," Zahid opined. "Nearly half of the population is illiterate and nearly half of those who are literate can only read or write their name. Naila talked about lack of rule of law. This can also be attributed to illiteracy, as only educated people are aware of their rights. Knowledge is power and only with this power we can make our society a better one."

"I appreciate the views of Zahid," Riaz said. "Few of us will deny the importance of education. But I wonder why we are disregarding religion. Departure from religion is the basic problem of ours. Religion is the source of

all morality, all virtue and all goodness. It's also the most powerful source of social control. Consciousness of sin is stronger and more compelling than sense of wrong. Under the impact of western media and education, we have disregarded our religious values with the result that we have degenerated into a chaotic lawless people. Fear of God is the strongest reason to be virtuous."

Sharif taking part in the debate said, "I agree that religion is a powerful source of morality and social control. However, in several societies where religion is not more than a private affair of the individual and confined to Sunday prayers, justice and morality prevail. So departure from religion with all its importance is not our basic problem. In my view, the basic social problem is the one which underlies most others. In our case, it's not that we are not religious; nor is it that we are an illiterate society. In fact we are a highly religious people. Education we are deficient in undeniably but look what our educated people have given us: massive corruption and blatant abuse of power. To me our fundamental problem is to be found in economics.

"Less than 5 per cent of the population commands more than 95 per cent of the resources. Top politicians, bureaucrats, generals, business and media tycoons and NGOs executives come of this elite class. Poverty and morality cannot co-exist. Who are the Taliban? In most cases, the poor, landless, jobless and penniless people. Where is religious militancy strong? In backward, underdeveloped, impoverished and poorer regions of the country. Though poverty can never be a justification for crime, it is in our case at least the most plausible explanation. Create economic justice, give people jobs and bread and terrorism will wither away."

"The economic argument is strong but political argument is even stronger," Javed maintained. Who will remove economic injustices? Only a popularly elected government responsible to the people. Who will ensure the rule of law? Only a legitimate, constitutional government. Our essential problem is that we haven't allowed democracy to take root. Most of the time, usurpers have governed us, who used and abused religion. Terrorism both in its birth and growth is the gift of dictators. Our salvation, survival and progress are linked to democracy."

At that point Sara remarked, "Excuse me, but we are discussing and prioritizing social problems without defining them. Moreover, we also need to define social good as a social problem is what hinders social good. Do we equate social good with mere material progress? Does social good mean mere absence of social injustice or does it include some affirmative action as well? Is a good society a crime free society? Besides, categorizing social problems into basic, secondary, or tertiary, is a question of priorities. In a society characterized by abject poverty, environmental pollution is hardly a

significant social problem. In a society where daily bomb blasts have put bare survival at premium, even endemic poverty is a secondary problem."

Wrapping up the discussion, Prof Ghani said, "As students of philosophy we should look at all dimensions of a problem. We must beware of the fallacy of over simplification. It's always convenient to pinpoint one problem as the basic problem. It's not necessary that one problem is the basic problem. There may be multiple problems of equal importance and priority, which combine to produce an effect. Terrorism for instance may be ascribed to a combination of economic, religious and political factors. Sometimes, conflicting factors may combine to produce an effect. Again, terrorism may be due to too little of religion. Alternately, it may be due to too much of religion. Finally, I agree with Sara that we need to define our terms at the outset. But remember definitions are the starting point of knowledge; they are not the end of it."

It was 11 p.m. Leaders of several militant outfits had gathered in a seminary in South Waziristan in the northwestern part of the country bordering Afghanistan. They were waiting for one person, whom they called the *ameer*. They did not have to wait long as a man of middle height in mid thirties wearing a thick black beard entered the room. He was surrounded by fearsome guards.

After customary greetings, the *ameer* began, "The army has stepped up its campaign against us. The reports are that an operation will soon be launched here. Besides, the drone attacks continue and will be intensified in the days to come. We have the option to surrender or retaliate, to die a martyr or to live in slavery. If any one among you is in favor of laying down arms, he can slink away. I guarantee his life and that of his family."

There was pin drop silence. The *ameer* looked around him and then with a smile said, "Thank God. There's no coward among us. Since we are to retaliate, the retaliation has to be strong. We should turn this country into a hell so that its flames burn everything. We should create total chaos and anarchy. Remember our war is not only against the state but also the people who have deviated from Islam. Every war is essentially a war of nerves so we must keep our nerves. Many in the state machinery are in sympathy with us. On top of that, the people have faith in our cause. Our enemies say that the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka lost so we are also doomed to failure. But our comparison with the Tamils is a false analogy, because they fought for a worldly cause but we are fighting for a divine cause. Therefore, final victory will be ours," the *ameer* concluded his monologue.

“But what are we going to do and how?” queried one militant leader.

“First of all we must forge unity in our ranks. Since our cause is the same and the enemy is common, there’s no reason we shouldn’t constitute a single force. Secondly, we should hit important targets. Nothing frightens a government more than high profile killings. The people who have ruled this country past and present are drawn from an elite class, which is coward and addicted to luxuries. Such people have no feet to stand on and will crumble when faced with the slightest of challenges.

“We should shake and eliminate the trust of the people in the government’s ability to protect them. But widespread havoc can’t be wrought until people in large numbers are killed. Yes, they are innocent but they have committed the sin of letting an un-Islamic government rule themselves. Death, I’m sure, will wash away their sins. The so-called *ulema* who are giving *fatwas* against us have also to be eliminated. They have sold their soul to the devil and therefore hell is their final abode. We need to make an example of them. Finally, a lot of support for our cause exists in political and religious circles. Such support has to be used to our advantage,” the *ameer* explained.

As the *ameer* finished, all present there held their hands and vowed to fight the holy war till their victory. The vows were followed by gunshots.

Chapter 3

Farzana was tall and fair in complexion. She had an aura of sensuality about her. Had she been ambitious and more intelligent, she would have brought many men to their knees. But she was simple and straightforward for whom happiness in life was more important than achievement.

It was ironic that Farzana had fallen in love with a person for whom life was neither a matter of happiness nor of achievement, who was interested more in the meaning of life than in life itself. She knew they were persons of different worlds. "But if matches are made in heavens then what appears to be a mismatch can become a perfect match," she would often console herself with such thoughts.

Her father, Babu Javed, was a low-ranking official in a high profile intelligence agency. His position offered a lot of opportunities to make money. He was a distant relation of Mr Naqvi and the two families being neighbours as well were on proximate terms. Babu Javed's only goal is life was to earn heaps and heaps of money. Both he and Mr Naqvi disapproved of each other's way of life. Mr Naqvi thought Babu Javed to be too unscrupulous. Babu Javed believed Mr Naqvi was too scrupulous a person, who was also stupid enough not to benefit from his position. The two would often debate on who was right and who was wrong without one convincing the other.

Javed's wife passed away a few years ago and Farzana was their only child. Though he never married again, he did have relations with women at different times. However, he made it a point to keep such women out of his house and to avoid exercising any corrupting influence on his daughter. Being a man of the world, Babu Javed had seen through Farzana's feelings for Ali. Though he disapproved of a potential match between the two — Ali for him was a good for nothing idiot — he never expressed his views to Farzana. Probably he thought that as she matured in years, she would see reason and realize that Ali was no match for her. But like other men of the world he was mistaken in his view that people were guided by reason alone. Being a matter of fact, he was apt to disregard the affairs of the heart.

On her part, Farzana hardly ever thought about his relationship with Ali in a pragmatic way. In fact, she seldom saw things in a pragmatic fashion, least of all human relations. Being a robust optimist, she believed everything would be smoothened in the end.

By contrast, Sara was a matter of fact girl. Daughter of a mega businessman, she, unlike most other girls, didn't have to regard studies as a means of getting

a job or a life partner. The success story of his father, a self-made man, had taught her two things: One, human will had immense potentialities and there was nothing a person could not accomplish provided she had strong ambition and the right understanding of herself and the world. Two, the social reality was essentially material and what a man did was largely shaped by her economic interest. Philosophy in particular and knowledge in general must make the world a better place to live and better for her had only one meaning — material — and only one direction — personal. She liked the people who were clear in what they wanted to do and had the will to achieve that. By the same token, she had inherent dislike of people who were emotionally unstable, intellectually confused and reluctant to act.

One Sunday she was having brunch with his father Seth Nisar.

“Sara,” he asked her, “what are your plans for the future? I’m asking this because I want you to assist me in the business.”

”Papa, after masters I have planned to go for the doctorate,” Sara replied. “So if you want me in the business, you’ll have to wait for a few years.”

”Dear you know I have brought you up to make your own decisions and I’ll respect whatever you decide.”

“Thanks papa for reposing trust in me.” Said Sara

At that moment, a servant came with a visiting card. “Sir I am sorry to meddle but you have a visitor who insists on seeing you immediately.”

Seth Nisar looked at the visiting card and then rising from the chair asked the servant to bring in the visitor.

As the servant went out, Sara asked her father, “Papa you don’t meet anyone without an appointment. Is the visitor someone special?”

“Yes, I need to meet him at once. You would excuse me,” Seth Nisar replied rather nervously as he went to the drawing room.

The visitor was already there. “Seth Nisar,” he said in a rough tone, “I am sorry for drawing upon your day-off but circumstances are such that I couldn’t wait.”

“I understand,” said Seth Nisar trying to look composed. “What can I do for you?”

“One million rupees immediately. This is all I want. I trust it’s not a big amount for you.”

“Certainly not.” said Seth Nisar and went to his bed room. He always kept plenty of cash in the house. He opened his locker, put the money in a bag and gave it to the visitor. “Pay my regards to your master.”

Sara was taken by surprise by the queer behaviour of his father. So she decided to speak to him.” Papa who was he?” she asked him as he returned.

“I told you he was someone special but please no more questions. I may explain it to you some time later.”

Sara convinced that her father wouldn’t answer her queries didn’t press him. She went to her study and started work on her weekend assignment on the psychology of moral judgment.

Chapter 4

"Knowledge is power," remarked Dr Junaid at the conclusion of his introductory lecture on 'the scope and limits of knowledge'. "What is remarkable about both knowledge and power is their amoral character. Knowledge gives us control over the physical and social environment. However, that power can be used in an ethical or unethical manner. Similarly, knowledge and power can be used by a person to his advantage or disadvantage. Knowledge can make one clearer in thought and more articulate in expression. But it can also make one more confused and reluctant to act. Knowledge is thus medicine and poison, a solution as well as a problem."

"Now the ball is in your court," he invited the class.

Sara taking the lead said," I don't agree that knowledge has any limits. The only limits are those of the seeker. I compare knowledge to a stream, which is in perpetual flow. It's an unceasing process of growth, which has infinite number of possibilities. The same may or may not be realized but they are up for grabs waiting for someone like Faust with the indomitable courage and the strong passion to get hold of them."

Riaz disagreeing with Sara remarked," In my view, knowledge has several limits. Knowledge is derived from certain cognitive sources, each of which has serious constraints. Whether it's reason, the senses or intuition, they report only a fragment of the world around us and even that fragmentary knowledge is not infallible. Limitlessness and infallibility can be ascribed only to the divine knowledge. Besides, Faust is not a good example. He sold his soul to the devil in pursuit of worldly pleasures and riches and knowledge to him was merely a means to those unworthy ends."

"In refuting me you're confirming me," said Sara looking at Riaz. "You're admitting that the possibilities of knowledge are innumerable and at least some knowledge — you call it divine — are unlimited."

Zahid, who did not like Riaz bringing divine knowledge to the discussion, said, "It would be better if we confined ourselves to human knowledge. Let's not enter into the divine territory. We cannot dub knowledge moral or immoral, unless we have a clear idea of what these terms signify. Also note that moral and immoral are relative terms. I think that the argument that knowledge is moral or immoral is based on two assumptions. One, the two terms are objective; two, we can know them. While man can have knowledge of good and evil —even in a relative sense — knowledge itself is beyond these moral categories."

All along the discussion, Ali remained silent, partly out of shyness and partly out of indecisiveness. He believed that one must be completely confident of what one has to say before one speaks. Dr Junaid also noticed this and encouraging Ali to speak asked, “Don’t you have anything to say?”

“Sir,” Ali replied rather languidly,” I’m afraid I am in a fix about the limits and ethics of knowledge. The more I think about them, the more uncertain I become.

“This is the paradox of knowledge. While knowledge reduces uncertainty, it also adds to it. You must be familiar with the maxim ‘fools rush in where angels fear to tread,’” remarked Dr Junaid.

“Does that mean Ali is the wisest of us all?” Sara asked

”Not necessarily,” replied Dr Junaid. “A man who is certain of his assumptions is not necessarily a fool. Nor is the one who is uncertain of them necessarily a philosopher. Perhaps we need the proverbial golden mean between certainty and uncertainty, between blind faith and thoroughgoing skepticism, between mindless submission and bold inquest. There may not be such a thing as indubitable knowledge. But this does not mean there is no such thing as knowledge.”

“At least the knowledge of oneself can be indubitable,” Naila joining the discussion said. “For, as French philosopher Descartes said, ‘I think therefore I am’.”

“Descartes’ dictum is open to objections, mainly because the indubitable, immediate knowledge is that of particular sensations or thoughts only. The knowledge of the self as the unity or identity underlying these sensations is inferential knowledge. And no inference is indubitable,” Dr Junaid clarified.

“But someone must have these sensations,” Naila insisted

“Again, the so-called necessity of having someone to have these sensations is inferential,” Dr Junaid reiterated his position.

Javed raised his hand and after a nod from Dr Junaid said, “My interest in the limits of knowledge is essentially practical not academic. We may take it for granted that we exist as no doubt we do and go beyond that. My question to you all is whether knowledge gives us control? Can I do something wrong despite knowing that it’s so?”

“Javed has asked a very pertinent question,” remarked Dr Junaid. “This is one of the perennial problems in the history of philosophy. Both Socrates and his celebrated disciple Plato believed that one could not intentionally do wrong. Both regarded knowledge as virtue. But this identification of knowledge with virtue has not gone well with most other philosophers. It’s a matter of common experience that people do commit immoral acts in spite of full knowledge of their consequences. So my answer to the question of yours is that knowledge doesn’t necessarily give us control.”

“Then this makes identification of knowledge with power dubious. Knowledge may be an element of power but there are other elements as well,” Javed observed.

“Granted,” interposed Sara. “But knowledge remains an essential element of power. One’s position in society gives one power more or less. But one must know how to use or abuse one’s position. Without knowledge, strength may become weakness. What do you say, professor?”

“You seem to have a valid point,” admitted Dr Junaid. “But this validity must be taken as tentative. There may be situations in which knowledge may become a source of weakness.”

“This all depends on how we are to define weakness,” said Ali. “Obedience to law may be a sign of weakness as well as strength.”

Dr Junaid looking at his watch said, “I don’t know but what I know with certainty is that we must sign off here to avoid missing our lunch.”

In the evening, while at his study table, Ali lit a cigarette and said to himself,” All such discussions are futile unless we define the basic terms. Aren’t all distinctions merely conceptual depending on how we define the terms involved? But aren’t our definitions themselves colored by our interest? One and many, unity and multiplicity, being and becoming, change and permanence, reality and illusion, justice and injustice, universals and particulars, are relative terms, whose meaning changes with the shift in our position?”

Ali’s train of thought was halted by the familiar voice of Farzana. She had come along with her father. Ali didn’t want to have his musing disrupted but he was called by his mother to the drawing room, where they all were seated.

“Hello uncle,” Ali paid customary regards to Babu Javed ignoring Farzana. “How is your job?”

“So far so good,” replied Babu Javed in the same cold tone. “I hope we haven’t intruded upon your privacy,” he remarked sarcastically.

“Certainly not,” Ali replied rather abstractly.

At that very moment, he unintentionally looked at Farzana, who was looking gorgeous in red dress and wearing a silver necklace. The sight of Farzana produced a strong sensation inside Ali. Their eyes met and she gave him a sweet smile. Confused, Ali began looking at the ceiling fan.

Farzana enjoying Ali’s predicament asked him, “Is there something special in the ceiling?”

Her remarks drew the attention of others and Ali seemed to be at a loss for words. Before anyone could put another question, Mrs Naqvi intervened and asked Farzana to help her in the kitchen. On her way to the kitchen, Farzana passed closer to Ali and he could feel the luring fragrance radiated by her.

“Ali, would you be kind enough to bring us the ashtray from my room?” Mr Naqvi asked him.

“Certainly father,” he replied and went towards his father’s room, which was adjacent to the kitchen. As he passed in front of the kitchen, his eyes again met Farzana, who was talking to Mrs Naqvi. Farzana again gave him a smile.

“Do you want anything?” Farzana asked him.

“I was just looking for the ashtray.”

“It’s here,” Mrs Naqvi pointed towards the ashtray. Before Ali could pick it up, Farzana picked up the ashtray and gave it to Ali. Their fingers touched, which made Ali tenser and he hurriedly left the place.

Farzana and her father stayed there for an hour. After they had gone, Ali went to his room and tried to resume his studies. But he was unable to concentrate. Farzana’s red dress, her smile and the sweet fragrance continued to overwhelm him. He turned off his laptop and went to the TV lounge, where his father and mother were watching TV. He continued watching TV after the couple had retired to their room.

After an hour, he came back to his room and tried to sleep but could not. He began to pace across the room. He felt inside him a strong desire to see Farzana but as usual he repressed it. Then he picked up his *Problems of*

Philosophy. But again could not concentrate. He turned pages but on each page he saw the beautiful face of Farzana smiling at him seductively. At that moment, the only problem of importance appeared to him was how to define his relationship with Farzana. Was it an illusion or was it real? He was stubbornly refusing to admit to himself that he was fascinated by that girl.

Suddenly, there was a slight knock at the door. As he opened the door, Farzana rushed in clad in the same red *shalwar-kameez*.

"May I come in?" she asked Ali.

"You are already in," he replied calmly uncharacteristic of him.

"I want to enter your heart and mind," she told him with her signature smile.

"You have already," he replied.

"I guess the way to heart is through the body and the way to the mind is through the senses. Let's unite our body and senses for unity or our heart and mind," Farzana invited him.

As she uttered these words, she gave her hand to Ali, which he took without any hesitation. As they came closer, the sensation inside Ali intensified and the next moment Farzana was in his arms. He could feel the pressure of her big breasts. He began to kiss her red lips and the long white neck. Then he squeezed her breast. As she moaned, his grip became stronger. Then with a violent moment, he removed her shirt and her voluptuous breasts were exposed to him. He kissed them madly. Before he could completely undress her, there was a crisp knock at the door. As he recovered, Ali saw himself alone in the room.

"Ali, are you ok? It's 8 in the morning and you haven't yet got up, shouted his mother."

Jamia Islamia was a famous seminary of the country, which attracted students not only from across the country but from various parts of the world as well. The seminary was founded by Hafiz Shafique some fifty years ago. Started off as a two-room rented premises, where the Quran was taught to neighboring children free of charge, the seminary expanded gradually and now it was spread over several acres of land.

After the death of Hafiz Shafique, the management of the seminary passed on

to his son Maulvi Zia, a man of untiring energy and tremendous practical wisdom. He was of the view that the seminaries needed to play a vital role in religious revival. Though himself educated in the mainstream institutions, Zia had a very low opinion of them. He firmly believed that such institutions were essentially a means of preserving the status quo. The best among them produced the ruling elite in politics, business and industry, while the rest produced the salaried class — managers and bureaucrats, clerks and accountants — who had to serve their masters to make a living. Change, he believed, could not come through those institutions. Only *madaris* could be the engine of change.

The process of change however, Maulvi Zia believed, was not going to be peaceful. Rather society must be prepared to pay sacrifices for the same. The *madaris* were destined to spearhead that change by creating a corps of ideologically motivated youth willing to wade through blood if need be in pursuit of the 'noble' cause of establishing an Islamic state. To effect the change, books were as important as bullets, the pen was as important as the sword. The graduates of the *madaris* must be well versed in Islamic thought as well as martial arts. The combination of the scholar and the militant in one person was Maulvi Zia's ideal.

"The mainstream institutions teach the will to doubt, we impart the will to believe. The mainstream institutions teach servitude to a person or class, we impart submission to Allah only. The mainstream institutions teach how best to serve one's own interest; we teach how best to serve the *ummah*." Maulvi Zia would often compare the two sets of educational institutions in that fashion.

"If one has faith in Allah and is ready to live and die for that, then everything is possible including miracles. Belief in God and the righteousness of one's cause is the strongest weapon, which can be profitably deployed to defeat an enemy however mighty and enormous, strong and well-equipped."

For Maulvi Zia, politics and economics, education and culture, arts and literature, laws and morals, science and technology, business and industry, all must have a religious basis. Divorced from religion, they would make for untrammeled freedom, which would beget anarchy and disorder, mayhem and chaos, ruthlessness and lawlessness, injustice and oppression.

It was on such ideals that the edifice of the Jamia Islamia was erected. The students would get up at dawn, offer prayers, followed by strenuous exercise, which included training in martial arts. After breakfast, classes would start and continue till afternoon prayers. The students would have lunch and an hour nap. After evening prayers, the students would take to sports like football

and wrestling. They would reassemble for sunset prayers. Then they would have dinner followed by late evening prayers. At 9, the students were supposed to go to bed.

In short, the Jamia had its own Spartan way of life, which every one had to follow scrupulously. Maulvi Zia would often remark that in his Jamia, in contrast with the mainstream institutions, teachers religiously performed their duty, were seldom absent from their class and students respected their teachers as they would respect their parents. However, students who made even a slight deviation from the prescribed code of conduct were subjected to severe punishment. For the *maulvi* that was perfectly legitimate as fear of punishment was an important element of the recipe for being virtuous. Students of ripe age were sent for *tabligh*, as it was regarded as the duty of every Muslim, a form of *jihad*, to invite others to the right path and prevent them from treading the wrong path.

One day while Maulvi Zia was sitting in his modestly furnished office in the Jamia, a message was delivered to him from the head of a militant organization. Written in Arabic, the content of the message was as follows:

Our most respected Maulvi Zia,

May Allah bless you!

As you are aware, the security forces have stepped up their campaign against the mujahideen. The purpose of the operation is to wipe out the soldiers of Islam so that the voice for Islamisation is muffled once and for all.

We have been dubbed militants, fundamentalists, extremists, terrorists and what not for purging the society of evil and promoting Islamic values. While we are not afraid of death, rather we welcome death, which will open to us the gates of the paradise; we want to live for the success of our noble mission.

Since you command tremendous respect and influence among politicians as well as civil society, you are requested to seek the support of political parties and civil society for putting an immediate halt to the military operation. Kindly remind them that the war that is being waged against us is that of the Christians, Jews and the West and that the misguided souls are being used against us.

Maulvi sahib you are a fountain of inspiration for us all and have been too kind to us in the past. We believe that you will not disappoint us this time as well.

May Allah protect us all and give us success!

The letter was unsigned and undated. However, the *maulvi* knew where it came from. Therefore, he assured the messenger of leaving no stone unturned in helping the militants.

Maulvi Zia was keeping a close eye on the recent developments in the war against terror. He was greatly concerned at the stepped up campaign against the militants. A number of them were the graduates of his seminary and he had pinned high hopes on them. He could not let the movement fizzle out as he saw in it the seeds of an Islamic revolution. He wondered that while there were more than fifty Muslim countries, none of them had an Islamic government. Only Afghanistan under the Taliban had an Islamic regime but that was removed by the West. The fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, he believed, was one of the bleakest events of Islamic history.

The *maulvi* had raised his voice against the surge in the campaign against militants. But he believed that much more was needed and that too urgently and systematically. He paced across the room thinking what to do. Eventually he decided to consult his confidant Dr Junaid.

"Junaid could we meet in the evening; it's urgent and important?" he asked him on the phone. "Yes my brother at your service," Dr Junaid replied.

At 5, in the evening, Junaid came to the farmhouse of Maulvi Zia.

"Your voice conveyed me your concern," he said to him.

"Yes, indeed I am very much concerned," Zia told Dr Junaid and also showed him the letter that he had received earlier in the day.

"What do you make of it?" he asked as Junaid finished reading the letter.

"We have many channels open to us," Junaid replied calmly. "We have political parties; we have students; we have the media; we have even human right organizations. We can use them to our advantage. There is already a lot of opposition against this war for one reason or another. What we need to do is to use this opposition in an apposite way."

"But how? Maulvi Zia asked anxiously."

"Just give me couple of days and I'll come up with a comprehensive plan. Meanwhile, forget your worries and have a nice time with Rubina, said Dr Junaid in a confident tone. "But where is she?"

"She should be around," replied Maulvi Zia in an abstract way. At that moment, Rubina entered dressed like an Arabic woman.

"Rubina," said Dr Junaid, you are looking like a princess from the *Arabian*

Nights: hot and seductive. I'm sure you'll take my brother out of his dejected mood."

"Rest assured, Rubina replied and took Maulvi Zia's arm in. I'm a perfect antidote to all doubts and all worries," she said smilingly getting closer to Maulvi Zia.

"Before you ask me to leave, I take your leave," said Dr Junaid winking at Maulvi Zia, as he rose from the chair. "Have a nice time."

The philosophy class was discussing the existence of God. They were all Muslims and since their childhood had been taught that God is the creator, sustainer and master of the entire universe. But being true seekers after the truth, they wanted to discuss the problem in a rational way transcending their childhood beliefs.

"Is the existence of God a philosophical problem?" Naila threw the question at her classmates.

"It must be so because no problem is outside the scope of philosophy," Sara responded. "Of course, it cannot be a religious problem, because religion takes the existence of God for granted. For religion, the existence of God is not a problem but a fact, not a question but an answer, not an assumption but an axiom, from which all other facts and truths follow. The universe, for religion, is a contingent being, which may or may not have existed. But God is a necessary being, whose non-existence is a logical contradiction."

"But if it were a philosophical problem," opined Javed, "then the existence or non-existence of God could not be taken for granted. While dealing with the existence of God philosophically, we must start with a clean slate. Is it possible? We all have been brought up in a particular religious tradition. And I don't think it's possible for us to completely transcend that tradition. It's an inseparable part of our collective psyche. Even if that were possible, whatever conclusion we reach, must be a tentative one and not a conclusive one. But would it make sense to affirm or deny the existence of God in a tentative fashion?"

"Well that's why we are here," remarked Sara. "If we cannot rise above our traditional beliefs, there is no reason we should study philosophy. Besides, it's not necessary that the result of our philosophical enquiry is at variance with our traditional beliefs."

"But what criteria should be used for establishing the existence or otherwise of God?" Naila asked. "Should it be a moral argument, a rational argument or

a pragmatic argument? Does God exist because there must be a being to administer absolute justice — punishing the wicked and rewarding the virtuous? Or does God exist because the order and harmony in the universe is inconceivable without a Supreme Intelligence, who ensures that the movements of the stars and planets and the alternation of the day and the night follow a regular pattern? Or God exists, simply because we need him?"

"Is not the existence of God a private affair of every individual? If I believe that God exists, I need no proof to confirm my belief," Zahid sought to simplify the problem.

Sara disagreeing said, "Friends, I'm afraid you are off the mark. We aren't disputing that the existence of God is a private affair and every one is entitled to have his or her own view of God. Mind you, there are different views of God in both philosophy and religion. The God of Spinoza is different from the God of Hegel. The God of Schopenhauer is different from the God of Bradley. The God of Christians is different from that of Hindus. We the Muslims have our own view of God. But as students of philosophy we need to examine the assumptions on the basis of which the existence of God is affirmed or denied. What are the beliefs in religion become the assumptions in philosophy. While a religion may provide some rational explanation for its beliefs; there's a red zone into which no one should enter and the first point in that red zone is the existence of God. In philosophy, however, there's no red zone and every zone is a green zone open to speculation."

Ali was all ears to the conversation. But as usual, he was reluctant to join it, because he was uncertain of what to say. Since childhood, he was taught that "God is the creator and sustainer of the entire universe. The world and everything in it owes its existence to God. Man has been created with a purpose and he is responsible to God for all his deeds and thoughts, actions and intentions."

He had grown up with those beliefs. He remembered that as a child he would often wonder, "If everything is made by God, who made God." Out of curiosity, he would put the question to his parents. Their answer was simple. "God has always existed and will always exist. He is above the limitations of birth and death, creation and destruction, growth and corruption."

But as he made the transition from belief to skepticism, dogma to doubt, axioms to assumptions and began looking for rational explanation of things visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, material and non-material, Ali was no more satisfied with childhood explanations. "If everything must have a cause, why should God be an exception?"

Sara noticing that Ali hadn't uttered a word invited him to join the discussion.

Ali mustering up the courage began, "I think the three arguments mentioned by Naila can be the starting point of our discussion. Let's begin with the moral argument. Presume that the existence of God is a moral necessity, while His non-existence is a moral impossibility. But we need to define our terms first. What is meant by moral necessity and moral impossibility? Is absolute justice a moral necessity? But what is absolute justice or even justice?" "I think before grappling with the problem of the existence of God, we need to settle the problems even basic to that like justice and injustice, necessity and contingency. Alternately, we may begin by assuming the existence of God and then should see whether it helps us answer basic ethical, epistemological and metaphysical problems in a more meaningful way than otherwise. If yes, God's existence is established. If not, well, then we need to revise our assumptions." In other words, either we infer the existence of God from the world or of the world from God."

Prof Ghani who was patiently listening to the discussion interposed. Addressing Ali, he said, "I'll give my views on your second suggestion first. Taking the existence of God for granted and then driving the existence of the world from that is a deductive approach relied upon by religion. While inferring the existence of God from that of the world is an inductive approach. I'll not pass any judgment as to which approach is sounder. But you need to be aware of the distinction. When Ali says that we need to define our terms, he has a point. The definition of the terms is important, because it influences the result of our enquiry.

"When we say God exists," continued Prof Ghani, "we must define what attributes we are investing in the concept of God. Is it the impersonal God of Spinoza we are talking about or the personal God of Jews, Christians and Muslims? This is important because few people would categorically deny the existence of God. The real split is not as much on the existence of God as on the attributes of God. Do we believe in a God, who is simply another term for nature and who merely represents the totality of the universe? Or do we believe in a God, who is qualitatively different from the world and its inhabitants? Do we believe in a God who shapes and regulates the affairs of the world and who is the sovereign power in the universe? Or do we believe in a God who, like mortals, has desires and fears and who is also subject to fate?

"Do we believe in a God who was merely the first cause and is no more related to the World? Or do we believe in a God who is very much involved in the world, who responds to our solicitations and petitions, who frequently intervenes in the affairs of the world to reward the just and punish the evil

doer, and who even incarnates himself in human form at crucial moments in history? The different concepts of God that we have had essentially differ on the divine attributes. When we change the divine attributes, we change the concept and meaning of God and we have a different philosophical problem. My advice to you therefore is to know precisely what you are seeking. In other words, as Ali said, you must define your terms. Any question or comment?"

I have a question sir," Riaz raised his hand. "Sir do you think it makes sense to have a God, who is not related to the world and is merely an abstraction."

"As students of philosophy," replied Prof Ghani, "you should overcome the tendency to defining things to suit your interest and desires. Again, are you looking for God as an objective reality independent of what you think and feel, pray and wish? Or are you looking for a God who responds to your subjective impressions and desires, needs and wants, hopes and fears, prayers and supplications?"

Before Riaz could reply, Sara intervened: "As a student of philosophy, to me the soundest concept of God is the one enunciated by Benedict Spinoza. God is an objective reality, the only substance, who exists in itself and of itself. If God exists merely because he is useful to us, then he exists for us and in this way is dependent on us. But I concede that such a concept of God does not appeal to the lay man. Hence, not surprisingly, Spinoza was charged with heresy."

"To me, whatever problem we discuss must have a meaning. The idea of God as merely a substance divests it of all its meaning. If Spinoza's is the correct concept of God, why do we even call Him God; call him just Nature with a capital 'N'. My point is that the relationship between the individual and God is the most personal and the most intimate of all relationships. Such a relationship is possible only if the individual can communicate with God. Hence we have prayers in every religion as the channel of communication between man and God," Riaz replied.

Sara looking askance at Riaz responded: "I'm afraid there's too much of religion but too little of philosophy in your thoughts. You first suppose what God should be like and then reject the concept of God that doesn't fit into your supposition. You are just begging the question. What do you say professor"?

Prof Ghani pondered for a while and then said, "Sara's point is valid theoretically. But I would also add that in practice belief in God is largely a psychological question. Philosophical merits apart, people will believe in a

God who bests suits their psyche. We tend to remember God more when we are in trouble than we are in comfort."

"Excuse me sir" interposed Sara, "but if you are right, then every concept of God is equally legitimate and valid. Then the terrorists who believe it to be a divine command to kill others are as much right as those preaching tolerance and compassion in the name of God."

"Your point is well taken," said Prof Ghani calmly. But you're talking normatively while I was speaking positively. I don't say that the terrorists who kill others in the name of God are justified. What I say is that most of the people most of the time will believe in a God who fulfils their psychological needs. That's why we have a host of ideas of God and will continue to have those. There will be as many concepts of God as the number of psyches. Even in this small group, there are multiple concepts of God as you differ in your psychological make-ups. As students of philosophy, we should be interested not only in what people believe but also why they believe."

Chapter 5

It was 11 in the morning. People were busy buying and selling in one of Lahore's largest markets, which was famous for offering a wide range of consumer items at low prices. Arbaz, a 16-year-old, was about half a kilometer from the market's entry point.

"Today is going to be the most important day of my life," he murmured to himself. "I'll fulfill the noble mission for which I was born and then the paradise will be my abode forever. Fortunate are also the people who have been chosen by Allah to help me fulfill that mission. Their sacrifice will wash away their sins and God's mercy will shower on them. May Allah help me!"

With such thoughts, Arbaz entered the market and began looking for the target. He was instructed to explode the bomb that he was carrying at such a point where it could result in maximum number of casualties. The greater the number of casualties, he was told, the nobler would be his action in the eye of God and the higher will be the reward in the hereafter. Security personnel were also standing there and he walked through them unnoticed.

"So *qari* sahib was right in telling me that the police will not stop me as I'll be invisible to them," Arbaz said to himself. "Martyrdom is my destiny and no one can obstruct my way."

In few minutes, he found his target. It was a long row outside a public utility store where grocery items were sold. "*Allah-o-Akbar*," Arbaz shouted and then pushed the button in his suicide jacket. Before the people could understand, there was a huge explosion.

The news of the blast spread in the city in no time. There was huge panic and commotion in the market. Blood and bodies could be seen everywhere. Soon law enforcement personnel, media persons and ambulances reached the spot. Later, in the evening, the authorities confirmed that the at least fifty people were killed in the explosion while scores were injured. A militant organization claimed responsibility for the incident.

While the friends and families of the victims were mourning their death, and those of the injured and the missing were concerned about their safety and whereabouts, life was as usual in the rest of the city as if nothing had happened. A fashion show was held in a five-star hotel that very evening, which was well attended by the elite of the city. Catwalk by slim and smart models wearing dresses designed by a bigwig of the fashion industry was followed by exhibition of various items of the beauty industry. A corps of media persons was also present not merely to cover the event but also because

the chief minister of the province had graced the occasion.

“Now I invite our chief guest, the honorable chief minister for his concluding remarks,” said Mrs Alvi, the organizer of the fashion show.”

The aging chief minister, who was still in thrall of the revealing models, cleared his throat and began, “I congratulate Mrs Alvi and other members of the Fashion Association for staging this wonderful event. At a time when the country is passing through a difficult phase, the holding of such colorful events sends out an eloquent message to the anti-state elements that our brave people will not be cowed by their nefarious activities. I trust the Association will continue holding such galas — and will also invite me. Thank you.”

“Excuse me sir, but don’t you think the fashion show should have been postponed, as a mark of solidarity with the victims of today’s explosion?” asked one journalist.

“You probably weren’t listening to my speech,” the chief minister said. “Such events give a clear message to the terrorists. Earlier in the day, I visited the hospital and asked after the injured persons. They are in a great spirit. The same spirit I saw here,” he added stealing a look at a barely dressed model.

“Mr Chief Minister,” said Mr Naqvi, who was covering the event as a VIP engagement, “while the city is bleeding, we are amusing ourselves with catwalks. If this sends any message, it’s only to the people that the government neither can protect them nor stands by them in their hour of trial. It’s like playing at the flute while Rome burns.”

The Chief Minister looking visibly angry at the remark said,” Naqvi sahib you’re a seasoned journalist but I’m afraid I’m disappointed that you pass such remarks. The government is doing all it can to protect the people. But as you know, acts of suicide terrorism are difficult to stop. And may I repeat that earlier in the day I visited the hospital and remained with the injured people for more than an hour. Moreover, we will give half million rupees to the heir of every deceased and one hundred thousand rupees to each injured. What more do you want?”

”Mr Chief Minister you know and I know that money cannot compensate for life. What people want of you is to give attention to their problems and the foremost among them at present is security,” Mr Naqvi not satisfied with the answer returned.

“We’re alive to our responsibilities. We the elected representatives always keep our finger at the pulse of the people,” the chief minister replied in a crisp

tone.

Before Mr Naqvi or any other journalist could speak further, the chief minister's staff officer intervened. "No more questions please. The honorable CM is to chair an important meeting on law and order shortly," he said.

Maulvi Zia was in a jubilant mood. The bomb explosion had achieved results more than he had expected.

"This is the nice beginning of our plan. With couple of other acts like this, we'll bring the government to its knees and force it to negotiate with the *mujahideen*. Now we'll put into effect part two of the plan. We'll call an all-party conference, which will demand an immediate halt to the military operation," Maulvi Zia said to Rubina.

"The government says they're in high spirits. I saw the chief minister on the TV in a fashion show," Rubina looking at Zia said.

"I know that old rascal and the bunch of bastards around him," Maulvi Zia in utter contempt remarked. "They're good for nothing imposters interested only in wine, women and wealth. They're spiritually barren, intellectually desolate and psychologically impotent. They don't know what it means to have a spirit."

"So there should be no cause for concern?" Rubina asked.

"It's not these people who make me concerned. On their own, they'll never dare to fight us. The source of my concern is the forces that are making the government fight against us."

"Who are these forces?

"The forces which are opposed to Islam. They have always been and will always be so. They have recruited Muslims in their ranks as well. The same forces, which centuries ago stopped the expansion of Islam. The same forces which a few years back toppled the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The same forces which have almost taken over our country. The government is no more than a puppet in their hands," observed Maulvi Zia.

Before Rubina could pose another question, Maulvi Zia interrupted her. "It's enough for now. Let's talk about something nicer and refiner."

The bomb blast in the politically sensitive city of Lahore alarmed the

government. An immediate inquiry was ordered into the incident. The *prima facie* evidence revealed that the blast was suicide and the culprit, who died on the spot, was aged between 15 and 20. The prime minister himself visited the scene and assured that the perpetrators would be dealt with an iron hand. "Nothing would attenuate our resolve to fight and defeat extremism," he declared.

"Should not the government step down for failure to protect the people?" asked one journalist.

"No!" the PM categorically stated. "The change in the government would only make things worse."

In the federal capital, an emergency meeting of the heads of law enforcement and spy agencies was called with the interior minister in the chair. After exchange of pleasantries, the minister referring to the Lahore incident remarked whether that was not a security lapse.

"I am afraid it is," admitted the head of a security agency candidly. But you know minister our priority is to safeguard key government installations and VIPs; and thank God, both are safe."

"But we're a democratically elected government and responsible to the people. If we fail to protect them, they will not vote for us in next elections. Besides, we need the support of the people to defeat the extremists."

"Sir you're right," the interior secretary chipped in, "but we're short on resources. Most of the policemen have been deployed on the security of ministers, top politicians, foreign diplomats and strategic places. Every one who matters in the country wants special security for himself and his family. We can protect either the lords or the commoners but not both."
"We need to protect both." Why don't we recruit more people to our security agencies?" asked the interior minister.

"I have already discussed this with the finance ministry. But the problem it that since we are facing revenue crunch, creating more jobs may not be possible," replied interior secretary.

"I'm well aware of the constraints of the government," said the minister. But we have to find a way out. If you people cannot do this, then I'm afraid I'll have no option but to replace you."

"Rest assured sir, we'll definitely find a way out. But we also need to explore the other option. I mean to engage the militants in negotiations," said the

interior secretary.

"If I correctly recall, this option was well discussed before the counter-terrorism policy was announced," said the minister in a sharp tone. "The broad agreement among the decision makers was that we'll negotiate with the militants only if they lay down their arms. That option is still on the table. However, unconditional offer of ceasefire to the militants will not only give them the time to strengthen themselves but also send a wrong message to the world as to our commitment to fight terrorism."

"Yes, you're right," the interior secretary nodded embarrassingly.

"What about monitoring of the *madaris*?" the minister asked.

"That's being done by the provincial governments. The problem is that several of the *madaris* are owned by political allies of the government. We have reports that Arbaz, the boy who exploded himself in Lahore the other day, was recruited by a famous seminary belonging to a key political ally of your party. Your permission was sought to raid the seminary, which you declined," the interior secretary explained.

"Politically that wasn't possible. But definitely we can keep an eye on the activities of other *madaris*."

"Sir lesser *madaris* don't pose a danger. It's the bigger ones that constitute the threat. But due to political constraints we have to think twice before acting against them," the interior secretary tried to bring home to the minister his point.

"May I speak sir?" asked a senior bureaucrat.

'Yes Mr Munir," the minister assented.

"Sir, I have had the opportunity to closely study the activities and curricula of the *madaris*. In my humble view, we cannot monitor the activities of the *madaris*. Either we have them or we don't have them. There's no intermediate choice. It's impossible for anyone to study in a seminary and not to learn religious bigotry and nurture antithetical feelings towards other creeds. I don't know of any seminary, which doesn't teach that killing members of the rival creed is a religious duty, whose reward is a never-ending life of perfect happiness and bliss in the hereafter. Most of the extremists are recruited by these seminaries. We may kill a few hundred extremists today but thousands more will be produced tomorrow," the veteran bureaucrat said.

“You may be right,” admitted the minister, “but closing down *madaris* as a root and branch remedy is not possible for us. We must also appreciate that these seminaries provide totally free education something which even the government doesn’t and can’t do.”

“But sir what kind of education do they provide. Don’t they glorify death, sanctify violence and justify militancy. Yes the accounting cost of the education provided by the *madaris* may be zero but its social cost is enormous.”

The Minister looking askance at Munir said, “I respect your experience but your suggestion is simply impracticable. You know there are a number of *madaris* in my own constituency. Do you want my voters to turn away from me in next elections? Any other view?”

The interior secretary sensing the minister’s mood said, “Sir you have made the right observations. We‘ll do only what is permitted by political expediency. And I assure you to check the incidence of terrorism. And if God forbid this is not done, we will hand in our resignations.”

“This is the spirit I like,” remarked the minister and rose from the chair signaling the end of the proceedings.

Chapter 6

"Your tea father," said Farzana to Babu Javed as she put his cup on the table.

"Thanks dear," he said. "I need to talk to you."

"Yes father."

"What I'm going to speak would have been done by your mother were she alive. But as things are, I'll have to talk to you. Coming straight to the point, I think it was high time you got married. You know I work for an intelligence agency and risk my life every day. If you get married, I'll discharge the greatest obligation of my life, which weighs heavily upon my heart."

"If you say so father," Farzana assented obediently.

"That's like a good girl," Babu Javed said with a smile. "You know my friend Barrister Aziz. His son Rashid is a promising lawyer and they are interested in you. I think he'll be a good match for you."

"Father I have always respected your views. But here I'm afraid I cannot. You know I love Ali and cannot think of marrying anyone but him."

"If you had named anyone else, I might have given it a thought. But Ali! He's a good for nothing idiot, who may never be able to earn a single penny. Suppose every young man on this earth dies and Ali is the only one who survives, even then I wouldn't let you marry him." Babu Javed responded in so many words.

"You have always misunderstood Ali. He's more intelligent, gentler and well mannered than anyone else. I think he has a very successful career open to him. Besides, we come of the same family and uncle Naqvi and auntie Fatima look upon me as their daughter," Farzana tried to convince her father.

"You're talking nonsense! Ali's not intelligent, he is only confused; he's not gentle, he's only coward; he's not well mannered, he's only shy. I don't think he can ever embark on any career with any degree of success. I say this because I know his family too well. As for your love for him, it's only a passion of the youth and will die down soon. Think over it and next time talk like a sensible girl." With those remarks, Babu Javed withdrew.

Babu Javed's words discomforted Farzana. She knew it would be difficult to solicit her father's approval for her match with Ali. At the same time, she couldn't conceive of marrying anyone else. The greater problem for Farzana

however was that Ali never responded to her overtures. She suspected that she had aroused in him feelings for her but as long as he didn't confess of the same, she couldn't be sure. If Ali was with her, she could always take a firm stand. But if he was not behind her, it would be difficult for her to resist his father. What should she do? She wasn't sure. But suddenly, it occurred to her that she should speak to Mrs Naqvi about that. Already she knew of her love for Ali.

So Farzana went to Mrs Naqvi and made her abreast of the situation.

"Farzana I understand the enormity of the situation and being a woman I can also appreciate how you feel," Mrs Naqvi told her. "In fact, years ago, I was placed in a similar predicament. My father would not allow me to marry Hassan come what may. But I took the decision, easily the most difficult decision of my life. And to date I have no regrets except that my father is not willing to see or even talk to me. I know how difficult it's to be away from one's parents. But that was the price I had to pay for my love for Hassan. However, I'll see that you don't have to pay that heavy a price. Don't worry I'll talk to Hassan and together we'll talk to your father."

Mrs Naqvi's words consoled Farzana.

"Thanks, you're like a mother to me. However, my situation is more difficult than yours. In your case, uncle Naqvi was with you heart and soul; but in my case I don't know where Ali stands."

"I understand what you're driving at. But I know Ali and can read in his eyes love for you. He's only too shy to admit this before you and me and even to himself. But don't worry I'll talk to him as well. But for me that's not a major problem. It's brining your father round to our point that's a difficult proposition," observed Mrs Naqvi.

Nothing could be more consoling for Farzana. Mrs Naqvi's words were a big support for her and she knew she would do all in her powers to effect a match between her and Ali.

In the evening, when Mr Naqvi returned home, Mrs Naqvi gave him an account of her conversation with Farzana.

"Farzana is a nice girl," remarked Mr Naqvi, "and would be a welcome addition to our family. To me the problem is two-fold: One, what Ali thinks about Farzana. You might have correctly guessed his feelings for her but unless we frankly talk to him, we can't be sure. The second problem is that Javed doesn't like Ali and so will not accept him as his son-in-law. Of course,

we'll try and convince him."

"And if he doesn't agree?

"Well, in that case, if the boy and girl agree then no one can stop them from marrying," said Mr Naqvi taking his wife's hand. "Our law and our religion allow this. What we'll do is to first talk to Ali and if we have correctly read his feelings for Farzana, we'll go to Babu Javed."

At dinner, Mr Naqvi said to Ali, "son we need to talk."

"What's that father?" Ali enquired.

What do you think about Farzana?" Mrs Naqvi asked.

"I don't understand," replied Ali.

"Son, your father and I were thinking how our daughter-in-law should look like. And we both agreed that she should be like Farzana. But it's your opinion and that of Farzana that matters. We'll speak of this to Farzana later. But we first want to hear you."

"I have never thought about marriage, because I'm too much preoccupied with my studies. As for Farzana, I can't say anything about her or for that matter about any other girl.

"You're right," said Mr Naqvi. "Your priority should be your studies and then your career. But marriage is also an important decision, which has to be made sooner or later. What we suggest, and you are free to disagree, is that you may be betrothed to Farzana. Marriage of course will be shelved until you have a job and get settled. But if you have any other girl in mind, we'll only respect your choice."

"There's no girl in my life," said Ali. "But if you insist, I can think about Farzana. But I still don't understand why this matter has cropped up all of a sudden and why you're in a haste?"

Mr and Mrs Naqvi looked towards each other and then decided that Ali should be told about things as they stood. Accordingly, Mrs Naqvi narrated to him her conversation with Farzana earlier in the day. They however, censored Babu Javed's remarks about Ali.

"So here you are. You want me to marry Farzana," Ali remarked.

"Yes, but for us your opinion is more important than anything else. We just want you to give a thought to our proposal. The decision will be yours and yours only."

"Ok. I'll think over that and then let you know."

Ali returned to his room. For the first time in his life, he consciously tried to define his relationship with Farzana. Up till now he had been preoccupied with the problems of philosophy. But now problem of a different type was before him. He tried to grapple with that problem in the same way as if he would deal with a philosophical problem. For him his relationship with Farzana was essentially a man-woman problem. "Why does a man need a woman and a woman need a man? For sexual satisfaction? Yes. For companionship? Yes. For security and sustenance? Yes. For having children? Yes.

"The need for the opposite gender is then rooted in instincts. And instincts have to be satisfied one way or another. Sex can be in or out of the wedlock. Children can be adopted. Companionship can be found in the same gender. Thus man can live without woman and woman without man. They may be irresistible to each other but are not indispensable. If man and woman are not indispensable to each other, no particular boy and girl can be indispensable to each other. So why should Farzana be indispensable to me or I to her? Besides, marriage or children can never be a priority to me. For I have devoted my life to solving the riddles of life. So what should I say to the father and the mother?" Ali thought. "Maybe I should tell them that I haven't yet made up my mind. Telling them abruptly that I have no intention of marrying Farzana or anyone else will not be the right thing."

At that moment, there was a spark in Ali's mind. "There may be certain situations in which speaking the truth isn't the right thing. Does that mean that nothing is right or wrong in all circumstances?" A case for ethical relativity, he thought. "All my thoughts invariably return to philosophy," he smiled to himself and went out for fresh air.

Farzana spent the entire night thinking whether Mrs Naqvi had talked to Ali about her and if yes what was his reaction? So next morning after breakfast when her father had left, she called Mrs Naqvi and asked her what had transpired between her and Ali.

She told her all about the dinner conversation and that her husband was at one with her in the matter. "I think, we should give Ali some time to decide and I'm confident that his decision will be what we expect," Mrs Naqvi tried to

reassure Farzana.

“I hope he will decide before father makes a decision,” Farzana said languidly.

“Don’t worry, we are with you and things will turn out good,” Mrs Naqvi again tried to reassure Farzana.

However, Farzana was not reassured. So she decided to speak to Ali herself. “But where should I talk to him. I cannot call him home in the absence of father. Nor will it be proper to talk to him in his house in the presence of his mother. I need to talk to him in private outside.” Having made the decision, she dialed Ali’s number.

“Ali it’s Farzana. I need to talk to you. Can we meet outside?”

Ali knew what Farzana wanted to talk and he didn’t want to discuss that with her. But against his will, he agreed to meet her.

“Where and when it will be convenient for you to meet me?” he asked her.

“National Park at 11 in the morning tomorrow.”

“Ok, I’ll be there,” he replied almost mechanically.

Farzana couldn’t sleep the whole night and kept on thinking what she should say to Ali and how would he react.

“I think I should frankly tell him everything,” she decided.

At the appointed hour, Farzana reached the National Park. Ali was already there and smoking nervously. It was for the first time that he would be talking to a girl one-to-one.

“What shall I say to Farzana? Speak the truth? Yes I should.”

“Hello Ali, I’m sure I ‘m not late.

“Certainly not,” he replied.

“You know why I‘m here.”

“I guess so,” Ali replied.

“Than what do you say?”

“Farzana you’re a good girl. But the problem is that I haven’t ever seen you from that angle.

“Ali I’m not here to get a character certificate from you. What I want of you is to tell me whether I can count on you,” Farzana said rather abruptly.

“If that means emotional attachment or having a permanent relationship with you, then I’m afraid it’s out of question. You can chart your own way,” Ali replied in a similar vein.

“I don’t need your permission to chart my way when it’s separate from yours. But certainly, I’m disappointed, because I expected a better response from you.”

I’m sorry Farzana if I have disappointed you but that’s how things are,” Ali replied plainly.

“Do you have anyone else in mind?” Farzana asked.

“No. None.”

“Have you anything against me?”

“Not in the least. It’s not about you. It’s simply because I’m not prepared for that role,” Ali said.

“I’m not asking you to marry me right now. I just want a commitment from you. And I’m saying this because I know how you feel for me,” Farzana said.

“If that’s what you think, then I fear you’re mistaken. On my part, I never threw any hint at you. And I can’t commit anything to you, which I know I am not likely to fulfill.”

“You’re not likely to fulfill or you don’t want to fulfill,” remarked Farzana.

“You can take it whichever way you like.”

“Ok. I guess I have got your answer,” Farzana said. “You’re right. I was mistaken in reading your feelings. I hope we’ll never meet again. Good bye.”

“Listen Farzana,” Ali called her but she went away.

Ali knew that Farzana was very emotional. He also knew that nothing was more frustrating to a woman than love that was unrequited.

He kept sitting in the park smoking cigarette after cigarette.

“Have I done the right thing? Shouldn’t I have requited her love with love? Even if I don’t love her, I might have handled the situation in a mature manner without injuring her feelings,” Ali reproached himself.

Then he saw a young couple holding hands and laughing. He felt a strong desire that the man were him and the woman were Farzana. But very next moment, he felt sorry for the man who he thought was wasting his time on a worthless passion.

“Every one falls in love and gets wedded. Not a big deal. The challenge is to get off the beaten track. After all there are better things in life to do than to date and mate,” Ali thought.

Farzana returned home dejected as never before. She had pinned high hopes on Ali but all her hopes were razed.

“So I was mistaken that Ali too loved me. But what should I do? Should I bow to the father’s wish and agree to marry the man he has chosen for me? Or should I refuse to marry anyone? Or should I again talk to auntie Fatima? Yes that will be better?”

Next morning, Farzana again met Mrs Naqvi and related to her Ali’s answer.

“You shouldn’t have talked to Ali. I had told you that we should give him some time. After all, it’s the question of his life and yours as well,” Mrs Naqvi mildly scolded Farzana.

“Forgive me, but I was too perplexed to know what to do”.

“Ok. Let me think over it. Meanwhile, if you happen to meet Ali, just behave in a normal way. Now smile, go home and watch a good movie.”

“There’s no point in taking up this matter with Ali again,” Mr Naqvi told his wife after hearing what had gone between their son and Farzana. His reply will be the same. Besides, I don’t want him to think too much about these things as it would distract him from his studies. In the meantime, we may talk to Javed requesting him to give us and Farzana some time. I hope he’ll see reason.”

“When you talk to Babu Javed, I would also like to be present,” said Mrs Naqvi.

“Ok.” Mr Naqvi assented.

Chapter 7

The Lahore blast was followed by similar incidents in other big cities in which scores of people were killed. The government came in for adverse criticism at the hands of the media and opposition political parties for failure to protect the people. The counter-terrorism strategy was also attacked for being fundamentally flawed. There were growing demands that the government halt the military operation and open an unconditional dialogue with the militants. The government however brushed aside such demands and declared to continue the operation until the militancy was put down.

It was in such circumstances that the Jamia Islamia of Maulvi Zia organized a conference against the counter-terrorism strategy. The conference was held in a luxury hotel and all parties opposed to the govt were invited to the event. The conference adopted a resolution calling for an immediate end to the military operation. At the end, Maulvi Zia announced to quit his alliance with the govt.

"Despite the best of our efforts, the govt is not inclined to halt the operation," said Maulvi Zia in a disappointing tone as he returned home after the conference. What should be our next step?" he asked Dr Junaid.

"We are arguing that the govt's counter-terrorism strategy is fundamentally flawed. Maybe our pro-terrorism strategy has the same characteristic. Let's think out of the box," opined Dr Junaid. "So far we have been trying to force a change in the govt's policy, which is not coming through. Why don't we think of changing the govt itself?"

"Change in the govt!" remarked Maulvi Zia, who was taken aback by this out-of-the-box proposal. "My brother," he said, "I appreciate your innovative ideas but the change in the govt is easier said than done."

"It may be a difficult proposition but not an impossible one. After all, govts do change for one reason or another. Why not for our reason?" remarked Dr Junaid.

"Can you elaborate?" Maulvi Zia asked.

"Yes certainly. There are two ways in which a change in the govt can be brought about. One, the govt is forced to step down through agitation politics. Two, the govt is voted out through a no confidence motion in parliament. The first option is already being exercised albeit unsuccessfully. But I wonder little attention has been paid to the second option," observed Dr Junaid.

“How much promise does an in-house change hold?” Maulvi Zia enquired.

“As you know, the govt has only a thin majority in parliament. You have already withdrawn your support from the govt. Now if some of the ruling party members are made to change their loyalty, the govt will collapse?

“I’m beginning to understand,” said Maulvi Zia. “But there are certain questions whose answer I need. One, who will form the next govt? Two, how will the ruling party members be made to change loyalties? Three, what is the guarantee that the next govt will play to our tune?”

Dr Junaid took a sip from his drink and replied, “Of course, the opposition parties will form a coalition. Ruling party members will be lured into changing their loyalties. A good number of them are annoyed with their leadership for not awarding them ministerial slots or not doling out loans and plots to them. We’ll promise them ministries and satisfy their appetite for wealth. To safeguard our interest, we’ll enter into an agreement with the govt-in-waiting to the effect that in his first public address the new prime minister will announce an immediate end to the military operation against the mujahideen and promise to revise other components of the counter terrorism strategy.”

Maulvi Zia looked at his cousin appreciatively and then gave him a nod. “And the money will be contributed by our patrons, well wishers, and the opposition parties. So how do we proceed?”

“I have a plan,” Dr Junaid replied.

Ali and the rest of the class began their study of the schools of philosophy with materialism.

“There are,” said Prof Ghani, “different types of materialism, such as mechanistic materialism and dialectical materialism. We’ll discuss these at length later.

“In essence,” he continued, “materialism has a simple philosophy. Matter is the reality and all knowledge is derived from the senses. There are only physical phenomena and forces and nothing exists beyond the material or physical realm. All the so-called mental or psychical phenomena can be reduced to physical phenomena. There’s no difference between reality and existence. Only that exists is real and what’s real must exist. The real must be known and verified empirically. Such terms as the soul and spirit and mind and consciousness have only figurative meaning; they cannot be taken in a literal sense for being beyond the scope of empiricism; they don’t exist and

hence are unreal. Now the house is open for discussion."

Javed taking the lead said, "Materialism commits the fallacy of over-simplification. There're of course material beings and physical phenomena but it's incorrect to say that nothing exists beyond such beings and phenomena. Take our own example. We have a body, which is composed of material particles and is held together by physical phenomena, such as respiration and circulation, digestion and metabolism. But there's definitely much more to us. We think and feel, fancy and conceive, desire and aspire, love and hate, hope and fear. How does materialism account for this?"

"It's quite simple," Sara interposed. "These so-called mental processes are essentially physiological changes taking place in the brain or the nervous system. Besides, some object or stimulus is needed to excite these changes and this stimulus in the ultimate analysis is physical."

"That may be the case. But in point of fact, the mental processes are essentially different from physical processes," Javed insisted. "One cannot be reduced to the other, though I admit that they are closely associated."

"This is what I dispute," Sara said sharply. "There's no such thing as mental processes distinct from physical ones. You cannot think or feel unless you have a body. When the body perishes, all these so-called independent processes come to an end. Can a man, even a genius, reason or imagine, conceive or perceive when he is dead? And what's death—simply the cessation of vital physiological processes i.e. the functioning of the brain and the heart. Man is thus essentially a physiological being."

"But how would you explain the existence of soul and consciousness?" Naila asked.

"I need not," replied Sara, "because the soul doesn't simply exist. What you call the soul is the sum-total of bodily functions. Similarly, what you call consciousness is a bundle of sensations, which are the result of interaction between the brain and the external world. If anything exists it must be seen or capable of being seen under special conditions. Consciousness or soul in their conventional meaning cannot be empirically verified. So they don't exist."

"But isn't it circular reasoning to argue that if something exists it must be perceived by the senses and if something can't be perceived by the senses it doesn't exist. Why should existence be taken in necessarily physical sense? Something metaphysical may exist," Naila argued.

"But how do you know that a metaphysical being exists?" Sara asked.

“Because I can feel or think so,” Naila replied.

“But your feelings and thoughts are purely subjective. A case can hardly be made for something existing in an objective sense on the basis of something subjective,” Sara argued.

“What if the majority of humankind shares such feelings or thoughts?” Naila posed another question.

Sara laughed and said, “An incorrect opinion does not become correct merely because the majority of people hold it. Collective folly is as strong a possibility as collective wisdom. While the view of the majority may prevail, just because it prevails it cannot be regarded as correct.”

“Interesting discussion,” intervened Prof Ghani before Naila or anyone else could rebut Sara, “but we must leave it here.”

Ali didn’t take part in the discussion but listened to it attentively. In particular, he was greatly impressed by the arguments of Sara most of which ran counter to their traditional beliefs. So after the class he went to her and said, “Sara you were excellent. But tell me do you really believe in what you were arguing?”

Sara, who didn’t have a high opinion of Ali, looked at him disapprovingly. ”What do you mean? What makes you think that I believe one thing and speak the other? Do you consider me a hypocrite?”

Ali, who hardly expected such nasty a response from his classmate, replied nervously: “Sara, please don’t misunderstand me. I didn’t mean it. I asked the question because what you were saying is at variance with what we normally believe.”

“You lower middle class people,” Sara remarked contemptuously, “can never transcend your traditional beliefs and manners not even for the sake of academic discussion. I don’t need a certificate from you or anyone else for what I believe and speak.”

Ali, at a loss what to say, withdrew without a word.

Sara was a composed and self-possessed person. She was therefore herself surprised why she behaved so rudely to Ali. He had approached her with compliments and his question didn’t mean to cause her any offence. She thought over that but could not come up with any plausible explanation.

However, she decided that she would apologize to Ali.

When she returned home, she saw her father pacing up and down the room. He was looking extremely disconcerted.

“What is it papa?” Sara asked.

Seth Nisar, realizing that his daughter had seen through his state of mind, said, “There’s something which I’m afraid I cannot share with you now.”

Before Sara could talk back, Seth Nisar’s cell phone rang up. “Yes, I’m coming,” he replied to the caller.

“Honey, I’m sorry I have got to leave immediately,” said Seth Nisar in a shaking voice and went out.

“What could be wrong with papa,” Sara thought. May be it’s some business problem. But I haven’t seen him like that before. I should better ask him when he returns.”

Seth Nisar came late in the night. When he entered the room, he saw Sara waiting for him. ”Thank God, you’re back. I was extremely concerned about you,” said Sara.

“I understand,” Seth Nisar replied rather coldly.

May I order dinner for you?” asked Sara.

“No, I have dined,” Seth Nisar responded in the same cold tone. I know you have a lot of questions. I promise I’ll answer each of them but not at the moment.”

Having said that, Seth Nisar retired to his room leaving Sara puzzled. After some time, Sara also went to her room. But she continued to think what was wrong with her father. “His health is as good as before. If it is some business problem, he would have shared the same with me, especially when he wants me to assist him in running the company.”

Sara also remembered the queer visitor who had called on her father couple of weeks back. “Who was he?” The servants had told him that the visitor was a middle aged man wearing a beard and had a rough-and-tough type of appearance. “Why did father meet such a person?” She had suspected that he had given her a bag full of money. “Has he committed a crime of which that man is a witness and is now blackmailing him?”

To Sara that seemed to be a plausible explanation. “This evening, he might have called papa for a similar favour. That’s why he is reluctant to share that with me. But I need to help him get out of this problem. Should I spy on him? Or should I hire someone to spy on him? No. I should myself do so, otherwise he will be exposed to another person.” So she decided to spy on her father. Having made the decision, she went to sleep.

Next day when she was in the university, Sara went to Ali and said,” I apologize for my behaviour yesterday.”

“It’s all right,” Ali said with an earnest smile. “Maybe I shouldn’t have asked you such question.”

“Let’s forget about that. What about a cup of tea?”

“I wouldn’t mind,” Ali said.

“Why are you looking uneasy,” Sara asked Ali as she ordered tea in the cafeteria.

Ali, who was having tea with a girl for the first time, said in a shaking voice, “No I’m ok.”

“Why do you keep silent in the class most of the time?” Sara asked.

“Well,” replied Ali, ”actually I’m a bit shy. Besides, sometimes I’m not sure what to say.”

“Do you think all others are certain about what they state?”

“But you seem to be one hundred per cent sure of what you state,” said Ali.

“I’ll advise you to get out of the shell that you have created around you.”

“Well I’ll try.”

“What about your family?” asked Sara, who was beginning to take interest in her queer classmate.

“Well my father is a journalist and my mother a lecturer. I’m the only child of my parents.”

“Like me,” Sara noted. “My father is a businessman.” At that moment her

thoughts went to his father, who she suspected was deep in trouble. “O my God, we’re getting late for the class!” Sara remarked as she saw the clock in front of her and poured tea down her throat. Ali followed her to the class room.

“So you have hooked up Sara,” Riaz taunted Ali as they came out of the classroom.

“What do you mean?” Ali asked.

“You know what I mean. She is the most sought after girl on the campus and you’re the first male who she has honoured with her sweet company over a cup of tea. How envious I’m of you,” said Riaz.
“I really don’t understand what you are driving at. It matters to me little that she is the most sought after girl on the campus. She just invited me to a cup of tea and I accepted her offer.”

“Of all of us, why did she invite you? There’s nothing in you which should attract as pretty and as intelligent a girl as Sara. You’re neither intelligent, nor rich nor good looking. May be she looks upon you as a case study,” remarked Riaz tauntingly.

“Ask her,” Ali said in indignation and walked away.

Chapter 8

The White Mosque was the most famous mosque of the capital. Located in the heart of the city, the mosque was the favourite venue for rallies and processions staged by the clergy. The mosque also housed separate seminaries for boys and girls, where poor students from far flung areas, who had no other means of education, received religious instruction. The White Mosque was affiliated with the Jamia Islamia of Maulvi Zia, who visited the mosque and led Friday prayers at least once a month. After the prayers, the maulvi would meet the students of the *madaris* as well as public delegations, who sought his guidance on questions of Islamic law and jurisprudence.

During one of his visits to the White Mosque, a student delegation asked him, "Maulvi sahib is it not our duty to wipe out evil?"

"Yes it's," the maulvi replied.

"There's too much evil around us," began one of the students in an emotional tone. "Video shops, which sell obscene movies and posters; music shops, which play loud provocative music round the clock; beauty parlors, where men and women come to decorate their bodies and faces; brothels, where shameless prostitutes cater to the needs of vulgar men. Filth, obscenity and vulgarity are endemic in the area. Is it not our duty to put an end to these evil things?"

Maulvi Zia thought for a moment and then said, "No doubt it's our sacred duty to combat and crush evil in whatever form it exists. But primarily, it's for the govt to take action against such evil businesses. Have you not complained to the police?" Maulvi Zia asked Maulana Majeed, the *khatib* of the White Mosque and in charge of the seminaries.

"Yes we have on numerous occasions," Maulana Majeed submitted. "But you know our police. They have turned a deaf ear to our complaints and shut their eyes to these vulgar businesses, which grease the palm of the police as well as the local member of the assembly. In such circumstances, we can't count on the machinery of the state."

Maulvi Zia went into deep thought and then said, "If the authorities are not alive to their duty, then we need to come forward. I'll advise you," he said looking at the students, "to begin with, go to these businesses and request them to mend their ways. Explain to them that what they are doing is at variance with the teachings of Islam. Tell them that in the short run they may suffer some loss due to closure of their businesses but in the long run, God will bestow His reward on them. Do that as I told you and come back to me.

But I warn you not to resort to the use of force. Give them an opportunity to voluntarily mend their ways."

With this exhortation, the maulvi asked the students to leave.

"Majeed, "Maulvi Zia spoke after the charged students had gone, "keep a close eye on the students. Let them do what they want as long as they don't take the law into their hands. By the way, what do you know about this brothel and parlor?"

"The parlor and the brothel are owned by a well known social worker Mrs Khan, a high class bitch in her younger days, though few people know this as she works behind the scene. Her customers are the elite of the city — senior civil and military officers, foreign diplomats, businessmen, NGO executives and top politicians. That's why the police are reluctant to act against them."

"Have you ever been to those places?" asked Maulvi Zia with a smile.

"What are you saying sir?" remarked Majeed. "What have I got to do with these filthy places?"

"I was just kidding," replied Maulvi Zia winking at his deputy. "But seriously, we must raise our voice against these evil businesses. This will give us an opportunity to talk to these elite and subsequently bargain with them. Besides, as the students say, it's our religious duty to curb such practices. But why did you not tell me about this before?"

"I thought it would be of little interest to you."

"Then you don't know me," Maulvi Zia chuckled. "Do you have that Mrs Khan's contact number?"

I don't have it now but I can get it for you."

"I have to catch my flight to Lahore. You'll send me the number when you get it," said Maulvi Zia in a commanding voice.

"**Hassan you said** that you had some important thing to talk to me about," said Babu Javed as Mr and Mrs Naqvi sat on a sofa in Babu Javed's drawing-room.

"Yes," said Mr Naqvi. "But where's Farzana?"

"She is taking painting classes and is out for the same."

“How nice! said Mrs Naqvi. “You have a wonderful daughter I must say.”

“Yes she is,” nodded Babu Javed getting impatient to know the purpose of the Naqvis’ call.

“Javed we have learnt that you’re planning to get Farzana married,” Mr Naqvi came to the point.

“Yes, you’re right. Farzana is now twenty-two and has done her graduation. It’s high time she got married. You must be familiar with Barrister Aziz. His son Rashid is also a promising lawyer. They are a nice family and I think Aziz would be a perfect match for Farzana.”

“I know Barrister Aziz, though I haven’t seen his son. They are a nice respectable family no doubt,” said Mr Naqvi. So have you conveyed your consent to them?”

“Not yet I’m afraid. Actually Barrister Aziz is abroad these days. He’ll be back next month and then we’ll arrange a formal engagement.

“Javed bhai, being Farzana’s father you’re entitled to find the best match for her. But have you solicited Farzana’s consent?” asked Mrs Naqvi.

“I know my daughter and I believe that she would abide by my decision. So no need for her formal consent,” replied Babu Javed.
“Without disputing what you say, I would request you to respect Farzana’s opinion. After all, it’s the question of her life.”

“What do you mean? Do you mean I have no respect for Farzana’s opinion? No one has her good closer to his heart than I,” Babu Javed responded sharply.

“Then you must know what she wants.”

Babu Javed knew full well what the Naqvis were driving at but pretended ignorance. “It will be better for all of us if you clearly come out with what you have in mind,” he said.

“Then my dear,” said Mr Naqvi, ”the fact of the matter is that Farzana and Ali like each other and we must respect their feelings as it’s a question of their life.”

Silence ensued for half a minute and then Babu Javed shouted, “What is this

nonsense?"

"This is true Javed bhai, "said Mrs Naqvi. Farzana is also dear to us like a daughter."

"But Ali? Do you want me to marry my daughter to a person who isn't capable of earning a single penny?"

"Why do you say this," said Mr Naqvi trying to remain calm. "Ali will have a bright career open to him once he completes his studies."

"A bright career! What he would do at the most. Earn a few thousand rupees like you. Do you want my daughter to cry for a decent life like sister Fatima?"

"Javed bhai money isn't everything. I have led a very happy and decent life with Hassan and I wish and I hope Farzana and Ali to lead a similar life of love and mutual understanding."

"I'm afraid I don't think Ali is eligible for my daughter. Besides, he'll take at least three to four years to settle and I can't wait for that long."

Before either Mr or Mrs Naqvi could speak, Babu Javed said," I don't want to talk about this matter further. Now if you excuse me, I have some important phone calls to make."

"What shall we do now?" asked Mrs Naqvi as they returned home.

"What options do we have?" said Mr Naqvi disappointingly. Ali is not interested and Javed has refused.

"If Ali agrees, then what?"

"Even then the problem will not be solved. Would Farzana marry Ali in the face of her father's opposition?"

"I trust she will. But it's better if he agrees." At any rate, we need to act fast. I suspect Javed bhai will have Farzana engaged earlier than we expected," said Mrs Naqvi.

"Ok tonight we once again talk to Ali. I was earlier of the view that we should speak no more of this to him as it will distract him from his studies. But since we have to act fast, the sooner it's done the better."

However, the Naqvis failed to convince Ali either and they finally accepted

that Farzana and Ali were not destined to meet. The next day Mrs Naqvi also apprised Farzana of this but only made her more distressed.

Farzana was counting a lot on Mr and Mrs Naqvi. She believed that they would be able to convince Ali and her father. But now all her hopes were dashed. Therefore much against her will, she went to her father and said," I'm willing to marry where you want me to."

"That's like a good girl!" exclaimed Babu Javed. You have relieved me of the greatest burden of my life. Trust me, Rashid will be a very good match for you and you would never regret bowing to my decision."

"Yes father, I hope so," replied Farzana in a languid voice.

One Sunday, Seth Nisar received a call. He told Sara that he had to leave immediately and might not be back for lunch. Seth Nisar was wont to spending the entire day-off at home. Hence, Sara surmised that her father was going on that queer business that had worried her. So she decided to spy on him. As soon as Seth Nisar left home, Sara followed her. The seth was himself driving the car, which was also unusual. He drove for twenty minutes and then stopped outside a farm house on the outskirts of the city. The guard deployed at the gate recognized him and let him go in.

Sara parked her car at some distance and decided to wait for his father. But even after an hour he didn't come back. Since it was holiday, the road presented a deserted look. However, she realized that if she waited there for too long, she might be noticed. So she decided to drive back. But before doing that, she drove closer to the gate so that she could read the house No. It was D-13.

"Is Mr Rehman here?" Sara asked the guard.

"Who? Mr Rehman? No madam he doesn't live here," the guard replied.

"I'm sorry but I was told that Mr Rehman of Vital Industries lives at D-13. I have an appointment with him."

"No madam this house belongs to Maulvi Zia sahib," the guard tried to be as polite as possible. "You have got it wrong."

"I guess so. Thanks; I'll have to re-check," said Sara and drove back home.

The name Maulvi Zia sounded familiar to Sara. But she couldn't recall. As

soon as she returned home, she went online. The search engine revealed to her that Maulvi Zia was the patron-in-chief of Jamia Islamia and a religio-political figure.

"What papa has got to do with a clergy?" she wondered. I know he's not a religious person. Then what is so particular about Maulvi Zia and his men that papa is always at their beck and call?"

Sara thought and thought over these questions but failed to come up with an answer. "At least I know who the cause of papa's visits is. Why is so? I need to find out. But it's a matter of satisfaction that papa has no relations with miscreants as Maulvi Zia is a well-known and widely respected person."

"**Welcome," said Maulvi** Zia as Seth Nisar entered his office. "Seth sahib, I requested your presence here because we have an important business to discuss."

Zia paused for a moment and then resumed, "In order to spare your precious time, I'll come straight to the point. We want to change the govt and need your support for this."

"Change the govt!" Seth Nisar half rose from his chair.

"Yes, I'm afraid that's the only way to bring the operation against the mujahideen to a halt and save our noble mission. We need heaps and heaps of money to lure some twenty greedy parliamentarians into change their loyalties," Maulvi Zia tersely explained.

"How much do you need from me?" Seth Nisar also came to the point.

"Only Rs 200 million."

"But this is a big amount," said Seth Nisar in protest.

"Not for you," Zia replied with a smile. Besides, for your contribution to a just cause you'll be rewarded both in this world and in the hereafter. To begin with, we'll ensure that the new govt allots you that precious piece of land that you are hankering after, and much more later."

"Ok. You'll have the money in a weak," promised Seth Nisar.

"That's why we like you so much," said Zia breaking into laughter. Let's celebrate."

Seth Nisar was the owner of a group of industries. His only objective in life was to expand his business empire. He started off as a petty shopkeeper but by dint of hard work, cunningness and favourable fortune rose in the ranks. Hence, not surprisingly, he considered himself to be the architect of his destiny. He had little use for religion or morality except for publicity purposes.

One day while he was in his office, his executive secretary told him that one Maulvi Zia was seeking an appointment with him.

"Tell him I'm too busy to meet him," replied Seth Nisar rather scornfully.

The next day he received a parcel with words 'personal and confidential' inscribed on it. He opened the envelope and saw a CD. He played the disk and was shocked to see what was in that.

Wealth had exercised a corrupting influence on Seth Nisar and turned him into a slave of his passions. The video that he received had captured one of his sexual exploits. As he finished watching the video, he received a call on his cell phone.

"I trust you have enjoyed the video. If you don't want others, especially your daughter to enjoy that as well, immediately see Maulvi Zia," said the caller.

The CD alarmed Seth Nisar and he decided to meet Zia at once. So he went to Maulvi Zia's house. He was kept waiting for two hours before Zia gave him an audience.

"How are you seth sahib?" said Maulvi Zia sarcastically. "I'm sorry you were called here in this manner. But you'll understand that we had no choice."

"What do you want of me?" Seth Nisar asked rather indigently.

"Don't be angry and don't be impatient. I have nothing against you and mean no harm to you. If you agree to cooperate with us, I assure you wouldn't be disappointed. Before we proceed, would you like to meet an acquaintance of yours?" said Zia and asked someone on the intercom to come in.

In a few seconds, the door was opened and in came a tall, pretty woman in early thirties. "I hope you two are well familiar with each other," said Zia with a devilish smile."

Seth Nisar turned back and sprang up from the chair as he saw the girl before him with whom he was captured in the CD while having sex.

“I hope you remember me, seth sahib,” said the girl with a smile.

“You here Bazga,” said Seth Nisar in disbelief.

“Yes it’s me, the woman said,”

“So you set Bazga to catch me,” said Nisar.

“I’m afraid this is true. Call her Bazga or whatever you may wish; it doesn’t matter. She is in my league. You can go,” he asked the girl and she withdrew.

“Why did you do this? asked Nisar.

“You are a smart businessman and you must be smart enough to see through this,” said Zia.

“You should be ashamed of what you are doing,” Seth Nisar returned. At least, this isn’t becoming of a man of religion.”

“Shouldn’t you be ashamed of how you exploit women who are just about the age of your daughter? Besides, why bring religion here? If something is wrong, it’s so for both the man of religion like me and the man of the world like you,” said Maulvi Zia in a crisp tone.

“What do you want me to do?” asked Nisar.

“Here you are. I’m least interested in whether you dishonor women or honour them, love them or make love with them. I’m not a woman right activist. Nor do I look down upon out-of-wedlock sex. However, I’m definitely interested in wealth and you have plenty of that,” said Zia with the calmness of a Zen master.

“So you have an eye on my wealth and want to exchange that for the CD,” said Nisar. How much do you want?”

“That’s like a businessman,” said Zia. “I told you I’m interested in wealth. This is true but it’s not the whole truth. I’m interested in wealth not for my own sake — I have already ample amount of it well beyond my personal needs — but for my noble cause.”

“What’s that noble cause?” asked Nisar.

“That I’ll tell you once you get our confidence,” said Zia. “For the present it’s sufficient for you to know that we can ruin your life and business by just uploading that video on the internet. But we’ll not do this. In exchange for that, you’ll be required to donate to us from time to time. I assure you that we’ll not only protect your secrets but using our influence and network will also help your business expand. You’ll agree that I’m offering you a square deal.”

Seth Nisar having understood that he was in the net assented. Since then he had been part of the racket. Gradually he came to know more about Zia and his movement. The more he knew, the more awesome they appeared to him. He also came to know that Zia had record of his other illegal and illicit activities and that there was no way out for him. He was asked from time to time to donate money to Zia. The latter on his part honoured his word. He safeguarded Nisar’s secrets and also helped his business grow. This led Nisar to realize that while the deal with the maulvi might not be a square one, it wasn’t a completely lose-lose situation for him either.

Chapter 9

"Last week," said Prof Ghani, "we started discussing materialism. To recapitulate, Sara was of the view that the reality was essentially material and empirical, while others disagreed with her. Let's resume the discussion. Who'll speak first?"

Naila was the first to raise her hand. "I would start with Sara's thesis that a view cannot be regarded as valid just because the majority of mankind holds it," she began. "I see eye to eye with her. However, if most of the people subscribe to a belief, one needs to look at why they do so. Such a belief cannot be brushed aside as simply a collective folly. Coming to the problem on hand, I mean the existence of a non-material reality, the important question is why do people believe in such a thing? *Prima facie* there's a lot of evidence in support of materialism. The world we see around us is physical. Our body is physical. Our primary needs are physical or physiological. We cannot survive without matter, whether it's food, water, air or sunlight. It's material progress that has made our lives so comfortable. The book before me is a collection of atoms. It was published in a printing press, which has physical existence.

"In short," she continued, "matter is essential for both our bare survival and well-being. But with all this importance of matter and material wants and needs, why are we not satisfied with a mere mechanistic explanation of the world and an economic interpretation of society? Why do we need to look beyond matter and mechanics, physics and economics? The answer is simple. Man is never satisfied with a purely materialistic interpretation of the world, life, history, society or humanity itself. I know that the light of the sun, the circulation of the blood and the beat of the heart are vital to my existence. But I also know and feel that there's something beyond these phenomena. Call it mind, idea, reason, spirit or soul. I wouldn't mind it as long as they aren't reduced to matter."

"Correct me if I'm wrong. You mean to say that the world of matter is an appearance and the world of ideas is real?" Prof Ghani asked.

Naila thought for a moment and then replied, "Not really sir. I don't regard matter as merely an appearance. To me both matter and mind, the body and soul, the senses and thought are real in their own right. Neither can be reduced to the other. Nor is one a substitute for the other. Our desire for food can't be satisfied by that for companionship and vice versa. A philosopher must live before he can philosophize and he must eat if he is to live. Yes of course. But it doesn't mean that a philosopher, or for that matter any other person, lives only for satisfaction of material needs, physical wants or carnal desires."

"Naila must be given full marks for her eloquence," said Sara. "But an eloquent argument is not necessarily valid. Just as a valid argument is not necessarily eloquent. The whole force of Naila's argument is that we feel that there should be something non-material. But there's a wide gulf between what one feels and what actually is or likely to be. I may feel or desire that I'm the prettiest girl in the world. But does this make me the prettiest girl? Certainly not."

Naila refusing to surrender said, "I'm afraid Sara you haven't got my reasoning. What I'm trying to establish is not that merely by desiring we can bring something into existence. My position is that the majority of the people cannot be wholly satisfied with a mechanistic-cum-economic interpretation of the world, society and human nature and that's why they want to go beyond that. And that's what we as students of philosophy are supposed to do: to go beyond what appears on the surface to what lies deep. If we take it for granted that things are only what they appear to be, then in that event there's no need for philosophy. Sara do you really believe that things actually are what they appear to be?"

Before Sara could reply Prof Ghani intervened: "The points of both Sara and Naila are well taken," he said. "Remember that we are here not to come up with final answers, assuming there can be such answers, but to stimulate in-depth discussion. Hence, here will be no winners and no losers. Though Naila's question is addressed to Sara, I'll like others to answer that or come out with views of their own."

Riaz accepting the invitation said, "I believe that philosophy must grow out of everyday experience. And our everyday experience tells us that things and people are often not what they appear to be. What seems altruism is often concealed self-interest; what seems good-will is often malice; what appears to be intelligence is often ignorance; what appears to be bravery is often stupidity; what seems to be beauty is often ugliness; what appears to be prudence is often cowardice; what appears to be friendship is often animosity. Likewise, matter may be merely an appearance and mind the reality. Even modern physics regards matter as ultimately a form of energy."

After Riaz had finished, Prof Ghani remarked spontaneously: "It's like Hindu philosophy of Upanishads. The world of matter is *maya* and the reality, which is essentially non-material, lies beyond the veil of *maya*."

"I don't know; I haven't studied Indian philosophy. But I believe things are not what they appear and modern science supports my contention," Riaz said.

“Does it apply to you as well Riaz? Sara asked. “You aren’t what you appear to be.”

“My dear it applies to us all,” Riaz said calmly. We all appear to be merely a physical being. But we have soul and mind, which by their very nature can’t be perceived. But they are real.”

“If Riaz is right, then sense perception cannot be the means of arriving at the truth? If it’s not, what else do we have? Zahid asked.

“This is precisely where materialism errs,” replied Riaz. It first takes it for granted that whatever is real or exists must be an object of perception. Then it infers that whatever cannot be perceived is unreal or non-existent. This is but circular reasoning. It’s just like saying that democracy is the best form of govt because it’s the govt of the people. In a word, I don’t believe in merely an empirical test of truth.”

At this Prof Ghani asked: “Would anyone else like to speak? If not, would Sara like to answer Riaz?”

As none else seemed inclined to speak, Sara with her signature smile said, “Thanks sir for the opportunity. Riaz is giving two different types of arguments. His first argument is from ordinary experience. I hardly dispute that the senses deceive us. Yes they do. But how do we know they deceive us? It’s only through the senses themselves. Reason can never give us fresh knowledge about the world. Reason for instance tells us that a person cannot both exist and not exist. But whether a person actually exists, reason can never tell us. Such knowledge is clearly beyond its domain. Only the senses can inform us of this. Yes, there’s frequently a discrepancy between appearance and reality. However, this is no ground for inferring that matter is merely appearance. In short, the knowledge of the world of which we are also a part rests on the testimony of the senses only.”

“I know some of you must be eager to counter Sara’s argument, But I’m afraid we’ll have to sign off here.” Prof Ghani said.
“It was an interesting piece of discussion,” said Riaz as they came out of the classroom. What about a cup of tea from me.”

“Why not,” Naila said.” I’m dying for tea.

“Let’s go,” said Riaz.

“No thanks,” said Sara. “I’m in hurry. Ali you have a few minutes for me?”

Sara took Ali to a corner and said something to him after which she made her way.

“What Sara was saying?” Riaz asked Ali as he joined them in the cafeteria.

“Nothing which concerns you,” replied Ali in an off-hand manner.

“Come on, we are friends and friends have no secrets,” Riaz insisted.

“I told you there’s nothing which concerns you,” Ali reiterated.

“Why are you pressing him?” Naila interposed.

“Ok, I’ll not,” Riaz nodded. But Sara, don’t you think she is too proud. After all, she could spend a few minutes with us.”

“Since Sara is not here, we had better not discuss her,” Javed said.

“But her views! I simply can’t take them,” Naila remarked. “Worse is the way she defends them — without rhyme or reason.”

Why do you say this?” Ali objected. She is entitled to hold her views. Besides, her arguments have the force of reason.”

“Ali you seem to be too much in thrall of Sara,’’ remarked Naila.

“No I’m not. I’m only speaking my mind,” said Ali.

“But under the influence of Sara. The cup of tea with her the other day has done wonders,” Riaz said tauntingly.

“May I remind you,” said Javed, “we are here to relax not quarrel? Let’s change the subject. Let’s talk about the limited overs cricket match between Pakistan and India scheduled tomorrow. Who do you think will be the winner?”

Cricket was one of the things Pakistanis were crazy about. For next half an hour, they talked about cricket. Riaz however continued to think why Sara was taking interest in Ali. “Why he? Why not me?” he asked himself time and again.

Chapter 10

Sara was still in the dark as to the connection between her father and Maulvi Zia. When reasoning and speculation failed her, she decided to meet Zia to know for herself what kind of person he was. "Maybe that will throw some light on the relationship between papa and him," she surmised.

But the girl was also aware of the risk involved in her plan. "I should have a confidante, who in the event that I get into some sort of trouble will at least know where I am. But who can such a person be?"

Sara was a solitary figure, who despite her enormous wealth and beauty didn't have a friend to whom she could look for help. As she thought about a confidante, only one name occurred to her — Ali. In a short period, Sara had developed deep interest in him. He appeared to be a solitary figure much like herself.

"Yes, I'll confide in Ali," Sara decided.

Accordingly, Sara gave Ali a brief account of the problem which agitated her mind, with the request to keep the same to himself. Ali promised to do so and also told Sara she could count on him for any assistance.

"If you permit," Ali asked her, "I can solicit information about Maulvi Zia from my father without mentioning you or your father."

"No, thanks, I'll do it myself," was Sara's reply.

The next question before Sara was how to seek an appointment with Maulvi Zia. She had gleaned that he was a very busy person. But she also knew that however busy a person was, he could not refuse appointment with a young beautiful girl like her. "But how should I introduce myself to him? I need to conceal my identity," was her answer.

"Sir a girl named Faiza, who is a British national, is doing research on *madaris* and wants to meet you," Maulvi Zia's secretary told him.

"Day after tomorrow at 11 in the morning," replied Zia.

On the appointed hour, Sara went to the Jamia Islamia. She was made to wait for ten minutes before she was ushered into Zia's office. The maulvi was sitting in his large but modestly furnished room. The moment he saw Sara, he was struck by her beauty.

“What can I do for you young lady,” Zia asked Sara scanning her from top to bottom as he mentioned her to a chair.

“Sir my name is Faiza Israr and I’m doing a comparative study of the education systems of *madaris* and mainstream education institutions. Since you run a most prestigious and well-known seminary, I believe your considered views will contribute a lot to the completion of my research,” Sara briefly mentioned the purpose of her visit.

“Have you visited any other seminary?” asked Zia.

“No sir yours is the first seminary I’m visiting.”

“Ok,” said Zia trying to conceal his pleasure that a beautiful girl had chosen him for that purpose.

“So where do we start?” he asked Sara.

“I beg your pardon.”

“I mean what do you want to ask?” Zia explained.

“I have prepared a list of questions, which I’ll take up with you with your permission. But I’m afraid my queries may require multiple sittings with you,” Sara replied in a soft tone.

“I’m available for any help,” Zia said opening his arms. “All you have to do is to catch me up. Before we proceed, may I ask you to give me some personal information about you?”

Sara, who was well prepared for such a question, replied, “I was born and brought up in England, though I have been visiting this country from time to time. My father is a solicitor and he is settled in London since long. I’m doing masters in South Asian studies from the School of Oriental Studies. Presently, I’m staying with my father’s relations.”

“Ok. That’s enough for the present. You can ask your questions. We have another forty-five minutes today and you can seek next appointment from my secretary,” said Zia.

“Sir my first question to you is how can one justify religious education in this age of scientific and technological advance?”

Maulvi Zia cleared his throat and replied: “Your question rests on the

assumption that religion is not relevant to the present age. I disagree with this totally. Religion is relevant to all ages and all places. And if religion is relevant, religious education is also relevant."

"But what's the rationale for religious education?" Sara asked.

"What's the rationale for non-religious or secular education, remarked Zia? "To help people lead a successful life. The same is the rationale for religious education. However, we, the men of religion, differ with the men and women of the world in our view of a successful life. Success for us is not merely material success. Rather it's a harmonization of material and moral good. For us means are as important as ends. That's why religious education attaches a lot of importance to the moral development of students — the aspect of education which is wholly disregarded by secular education."

"It's alleged," said Sara, "that religious education disregards what you call the material aspect of education and that the graduates from the *madaris* are incapable of taking to any socially useful profession."

"This allegation is not valid," answered Maulvi Zia calmly. "First what is a socially useful profession? The answer is simple: one that advances social good. Is religion or morality not an element of social good? Do the people who propagate religion, who promote religious understanding and who lead prayers and conduct religious ceremonies not perform a socially useful work? Yes they do."

"But how many jobs are open to your graduates?" asked Sara.

"Yes that's a problem. But the fault lies not in religious education but in society that doesn't accord religion its due place. Ours is a materialistic society, where what matters is what one possesses rather than what one does. There's a growing tendency to confine religion to certain rituals at the time of birth, death and marriage, while religion is much more than this. It covers the entire spectrum of life. Religious beliefs and values guide us in every aspect of life provided we understand and adhere to them. But we have not given up hopes and we expect a lot from young educated people like you to help remove misunderstanding about the role of religion and religious education in society."

"Granted that religious education has an important function to perform in society, can it be a substitute for scientific education?" Sara put another question.

"A very pertinent question," remarked Maulvi Zia. "Your question embodies

a common misconception about religious education. I want to make it clear that religion can never be a substitute for science, and religious education can never be an alternative for scientific education. In fact, the relationship between religion and science is not simply a choice between alternatives. We need both of them as each has its own role in society. Science is necessary to give us control over the environment. However, science doesn't tell us how best to use that control. It's religion which tells us how to use that power in an ethical, responsible manner. Religion, if you allow me to say, is the conscience of science. And nothing is more dangerous than science without conscience. What's the function of conscience? To tame our instincts and regulate our passions. And this is precisely the function of religion and religious education. In sum, in my view, religious and scientific education complement rather than compete with each other. We need both."

"Does this mean that education institutions should impart both type of education?" Sara asked.

"In principle, I'm against the segregation of religious and scientific or non religious education. The purpose of education is personality development for which both types of education are essential. Therefore, one academic institution should impart both types of education. There shouldn't be separate seminaries providing exclusively religious education. However, in practice this is not the case. That's why we have the mainstream institutions, providing non-religious education, and the *madaris* devoted exclusively to providing religious education. The former is producing men of the world having little understanding of religion; the latter is producing men of religion having little understanding of science and contemporary disciplines. This social cleavage is not only at variance with the spirit of Islam but is also dangerous for society. I would like to see an end to this cleavage as early as possible by having a single education system. Impart both types of education and then let the students themselves decide in which to specialize."

"Does this cleavage you have referred to exist in the Jamia Islamia?"

"I'm afraid it does," admitted Maulvi Zia. "The Jamia's focus is on religious education. The reason for this is that the mainstream institutions neglect religious education so we have to make up for that. I assure you, if the govt decides to set up one education system, I'll be the first to implement it in the Jamia."

Hardly had the maulvi finished when his phone rang up.

"How are you seth sahib?" Maulvi Zia asked the caller. "Ok I'm waiting for you."

“I’m sorry; a friend was on the line.”

“It’s all right,” said Sara with a smile as she wondered whether the caller whom the maulvi had called seth sahib was her father.

“Ok, last question before I leave for prayers,” said Zia looking at his wrist watch.

“I think I should leave now. Thanks for giving me your valuable time. I’ll seek next appointment from your secretary.”

“You’re welcome,” said Zia as he rose to bid *adieu* to Sara. As she turned her back, Zia had a look at her from behind. “Good for bad purpose,” he murmured to himself.

Sara had guessed and correctly so that the caller was her father and would be arriving shortly. So she decided to leave earlier lest her father might see her. But as she was leaving the seminary, she saw Dr Junaid alighting from his car. Fortunately, the latter did not notice her as he was busy on his mobile phone.

“What Dr Junaid is doing here,” Sara wondered. “A person as liberal as Dr Junaid in a seminary! Perhaps, like father, he has some business with Zia going beyond religion.”

Sara however was impressed with Maulvi Zia. He had answered her questions in a simple but confident tone. But she felt things at the Jamia were not as they appeared to be. And instantly she was reminded of the discussion in the class the other day on the dichotomy of appearance and reality.

“Yes I admit of the appearance-reality dichotomy but this is no refutation of materialism or affirmation of idealism.” She had skipped two classes that day for meeting with Maulvi Zia. So she decided to give a call to Ali to know what the class had discussed. She also decided that she should meet Zia again.

“You are looking very happy,” remarked Dr Junaid as he met Zia.

“Yes, and this is for two reasons,” replied Zia. “First, the money has been arranged. And secondly, I just had a meeting with a fairy.”

“Good!” Dr Junaid remarked. “And who’s this fairy?”

“She has come from England for research on *madaris*,” replied Zia.

At that moment, Zia was told on the intercom that Seth Nisar had arrived. "Send him in," Zia told his secretary.

Sara gave Ali a call and told him about the interview with Maulvi Zia. She also told him that she had seen Dr Junaid in the Jamia Islamia. "I wonder what he was doing there," Sara remarked.

"Well, this is also surprising for me," Ali endorsed her.

"Ok we'll discuss it later. "Anything special in the class?" Sara asked.

"Nothing in particular," Ali replied.
"**Farzana is being** engaged tomorrow," Mrs Naqvi told Ali at the evening tea.

"Oh I see!" remarked Ali. "Who's the lucky person?

"His name is Rashid, a lawyer by profession and his father is a friend of Babu Javed. It would have been better if you were that lucky person."

"I'm sorry but I had told you it was not possible for me," said Ali. "Would you be going to the engagement?"

"Yes we all three have been invited," Mrs Naqvi told him.

"Mother you know I'm not used to attending these engagements and marriages. So please excuse me."

"Ok. You have your way," said Mrs Naqvi and withdrew.

Before his mother Ali pretended as if the news of Farzana's engagement didn't matter to him. But actually he was crestfallen by that news. In his heart of hearts, he had wished that Farzana would never be married to anyone else and she would always remain his whether or not he married her. But the news of Farzana's engagement threw him into that mood of despondency and remorse which was so characteristic of him.

"What have I done? Was I right in rejecting Farzana? Would she have been a burden on me? Yes, she would have distracted me from my studies and career. Marriage is not a big deal. Every one gets married. The thing is to do something special, which the ordinary folk cannot. Family and children is a burden which I can ill-afford. They turn a person into a wage earning machine. Marriage has a high opportunity cost, which I cannot afford. So my decision was right." Ali sought to rationalize his situation.

“But if Farzana meant nothing to me, why do I miss her? Why does her face appear before me time and again? Why do I wait for her when she does not come? Why do I look for her when she is not around? Maybe I am also in love with her? But being in or out of love is not within one’s powers. However, translating that feeling into a permanent relationship is well within our power.

“Probably, I and Farzana weren’t made for each other. Even if I had married her, I wouldn’t have kept her happy. But will I be happy without her? And would she be happy without me? How dejected she was when I turned her proposal down. At that time, I didn’t realize that; but now I do. But what is done is done, it cannot be undone. But still all may not be lost. Maybe something can still be done. But what can I do? Can I stop her engagement? Yes I can talk to mother, she can talk to father and together they can talk to Javed uncle. Yes I have to act now as time is not on my side.” Ali’s monologue continued.

“Not that fast! Am I being emotional? Emotions are an obstacle to clear thinking. I can make rights decisions only if I think clearly and dispassionately. Reason tells me to let Farzana get engaged and married. I had better concentrate on my studies. This reminds me of the assignment that I have to make. Yes I forgot to tell Sara about the assignment. Sara is a nice girl. She has everything that a man looks for in a woman — wealth and beauty, intelligence and respectability. But why am I thinking about her? I should just give her a call and share with her the assignment topic. What was it? Yes, the ‘Fallacies in Reasoning’.”

Emboldened by the confirmation from Maulvi Zia, that it was their duty to fight evil, the students of the White Mosque decided to take on the wicked doing business in the adjoining areas. A band of thirty students comprising *burq*a clad young women and beard wearing young men all carrying batons went to a video shop chanting slogans of ‘*Allah-o-Akbar*’. The band leader, Farooq, entered the shop along with a few of his colleagues, while the rest remained outside to ensure no one stepped in or out.

“Can we speak to you for a few minutes?” Farooq politely asked Ehsan, the shopkeeper.

Without waiting for a nod, he continued, ”You know sir the blessings of Almighty Allah are infinite in number. He has given us eyes to see, ears to hear, mind to think and the heart to feel. Above all, he has sent us to this world as Muslims. In return, we should make a proper and responsible use of

these faculties. We should see no evil, hear no evil, think no evil and tolerate no evil. Besides, this world is a temporary abode and the real and permanent abode is the life hereafter. We must therefore prepare ourselves for the life to come through right actions and right thoughts." As Farooq finished those words, he looked at Ehsan, who gave him a nod.

"When it comes to right thoughts and deeds, we owe responsibility to not only ourselves but also to those around us. Because we come of the same family, the good of one is the good of all and the sufferings of one are the sufferings of all. On the day of reckoning, God will hold us accountable not only for what we did and did not do for ourselves but also for what we did and did not do for others. Therefore, it's out duty to promote good and combat evil. Do you agree with what I have said?" Farooq asked.

"Yes I do," Ehsan replied with a sense of guilt.

"We are glad to hear this. You think like a true Muslim but you must also act like a true Muslim. As a true believer, it's your duty to earn your living by honest, lawful means," Farooq continued his sermon.

"I'm already doing this," Ehsan replied. I open my shop at 10 in the morning and shut down at 7 in the evening working nine hours at a stretch."

"The number of hours that you put in is not important. How you make your living is what really matters together with the effects that your business exercises on society," returned Farooq.

"What is this?" he pointed towards the poster of a famous film star exposing her voluptuous breasts. "And what is this?" he pointed towards the CD of the movie *Basic Instincts*. "This is only what appears to us. I fear much dangerous stuff will be in store."

"I'll withdraw this poster and the CD," said Ehsan brimming with embarrassment.

"No, that wouldn't be enough. Such stuff would again be on display after we are gone. Let's eliminate the root of the problem. What we want of you is to discard this obnoxious business. Turn your video shop into a book store and sell books on Islam. Disseminate useful information about religion and instead of corrupting the youth, reform them. We give you two weeks to do the needful failing which you'll face the consequences."

"This is hardly fair," cried Ehsan in protest. How can I change my business in such a short span? Besides, I'm running this video shop under a licence from

the local authorities. If they have no objection, why do you have?"

"If the government is not alive to its responsibilities, there is no reason we should also be oblivious of ours. As for your loss, you ought to be more concerned about what you'll suffer in the life to come if you continue with this business," Farooq yelled scornfully.

"But sir I have a family to support and my children will starve if I close my business," beseeched Ehsan.

"You care about your family and children but damn care what you are doing to other families and children. If your intention is right, Allah will help you and you'll re-establish your business in no time. We'll also pray for you." With those words, Farooq and other students left the shop leaving Ehsan high and dry.

The White Mosque band went to other video and music shops and gave the same message to their owners. Their warning caused commotion in the market. The matter was brought to the traders' association and they decided to take up the matter with the management of the White Mosque.

Chapter 11

Thanks to generous contributions by Seth Nisar and others, Maulvi Zia and opposition parties amassed enough resources for change in the govt. They were already in contact with some ruling party parliamentarians, who assured them of their support, provided they were adequately rewarded in return. The opposition itself had no policy on terrorism but was opposing the government policy just for the sake of opposition.

It was in that context that anti-government forces were meeting. Addressing the meeting, Maulvi Zia, who was playing host, said, "Today we are here to finalize our strategy for ousting the government, which is an incarnation of evil and a symbol of corruption. Worst, and this is intolerable for us, the government is pursuing policies, which are threatening our religion and independence. The rulers have become a puppet in the hands of anti-Islam forces.

"They have," Zia continued, "compromised the sovereignty of the country and are putting down the resistance of the *mujahideen*, who are fighting only for Islam. We have tried our best to have the rulers change their policies but they are insensitive to our demand. Now the only option we are left with is to change the govt. We are tremendously grateful to Malik Naseem, the opposition leader, for agreeing to be the new prime minister. We have completed our homework and we are confident that God willing we'll topple this evil government. Now I'll request honorable Malik Naseem to say a few words."

Malik Naseem was in late fifties but had a remarkably good health. He came of a family of landlords for whom politics was the favorite pastime. As in case of several other landlords, he had turned an industrialist and was currently counted among frontline politicians of the country. Like other politicians, he was interested only in grabbing power regardless of the means. Himself he wasn't a religious person and had little sympathy for the militants. But he was shrewd enough to see in the war on militancy a convenient stick to beat the government with and eventually to dislodge it.

Looking at Zia, Malik Naseem began, "Maulvi sahib is a friend, philosopher and spiritual guide for me. It's my privilege that he has trusted me with the leadership of the country and I assure you all that I'll come up to his expectations. This government, which is a dismal failure, has to go. We have no interest in power. But we are committed to safeguarding the sovereignty of the country and promoting peace and welfare of the people. I assure you, that once we are in the saddle, we'll reverse the polices of the government, particularly we'll make complete peace with the *mujahideen* and liberate the

country from the yolk of western imperialism."

Malik Naseem was followed by some other political and religious leaders all of whom castigated the government for what they dubbed its anti-people and anti-Islam policies. The speeches were followed by a sumptuous dinner. After that, all departed leaving only Maulvi Zia and Malik Naseem.

"What chances do we really have?" asked Zia.

"We need the support of only twenty MPs to form the government and to date some twenty-five of them belonging to the ruling party have contacted me," replied Malik Naseem.

"What do they want?" asked Zia.

"Each of them wants 20 to 30 million rupees in cash, in addition to the ministerial slot when we form the govt."

"We have arranged the money. So that wouldn't be any problem. As for the ministerial office, that we can see after the government is formed," said Zia.

"The problem is not winning the support of these MPs. The problem is how to retain it. These bastards are fickle as a woman. They may support us today and then ditch us tomorrow," said Naseem.

"What if we take oath of loyalty from them under the holy Quran," opined Zia

"If a man is to turn back on his word," no oath can stop him. Every day people swear by the holy book and then lie."

"So what are we going to do?" asked Zia.

"We'll go ahead with our plan. No matter what we do, politics and politicians will remain as they are. So their being untrustworthy should be no cause for us not to pursue our objective. I don't mean to disappoint you but only want to show you the things as they are. In a two weeks' time, we'll move a no-confidence motion against the prime minister in the National Assembly. However, we'll not disclose the names of the turncoats from the ruling party until the day the no-confidence motion is put to vote. Absolute confidentiality is necessary. Even my party members don't know who these parliamentarians are," Malik Naseem explained.

"What about the establishment? Would it support us or remain neutral?

“In politics,” replied Malik Naseem, “there’s no such thing as neutrality. If the establishment doesn’t oppose a political change, it means it’s supporting it. The establishment knows that we are planning a change and they haven’t shown any reservation against that. It means they support it.”

“But you know we are seeking this change only because we want the military operation come to an immediate halt together with a fundamental change in the counter-militancy policy. I hope you’ll keep your word on that. But how will the establishment react to that?” asked Zia.

“Do you think the establishment is in favor of the military operation? No, they aren’t. The present government has placed them in such a situation that they have to support the operation. Trust me. We would change this government’s policies, but the change will be slow and on your part, you’ll use your influence on the militants to put a stop to suicide attacks. No government wants its authority to be openly challenged,” said Malik Naseem.

“Don’t worry,” responded Zia, “we’ll reciprocate your government’s gesture.”

“Let’s not think too much about the future. Let’s take things as they come. Meanwhile, deposit the money that you have collected in these accounts,” said Malik Naseem as he gave Zia a list. “Also make sure that at least couple of more bomb blasts take place before we move the no-confidence motion. This will weaken the government to our advantage.”

“That will be done,” assured Zia glancing at the list.

“**In our module** on the social relevance of philosophy,” said Dr Junaid to his students, “today we start discussion on political philosophy with special reference to the need for a political society or state, the basis of political legitimacy and obligation, the meaning of political freedom and authority, and democracy and competing political systems. Though you are at liberty to refer to any political system in support of your arguments, I’ll appreciate if the references are drawn from our own society and the political system. But first I’ll give you an outline of the political theory.

Dr Junaid paused for couple of seconds and then resumed: “As in case of other branches of philosophy, the Greeks were the first to deal with the questions of political philosophy in a systematic manner. For both Plato and Aristotle, political society or the state is a natural institution in that it originates in the basic needs of man and continues up to the highest life. The state therefore is indispensable not only for the survival of the individual but also for actualization of his potentialities. The state comprehends the entire

life of man including religion and morals. For the Greeks, the good man is necessarily a good citizen and there cannot be a conflict between the private good and the social good.

"Subsequent political theorists," continued Dr Junaid, "differed on the need and role of the state. Anarchists question the very need of the state. For them, the state is essentially an instrument of oppression and injustice, and hence must be done away with. Marxists, like anarchists, regard the state as an incarnation of evil, an instrument of exploitation in the hands of the dominant class. They believe that the state will eventually wither away but only after a communist society is in place. A communist society being a classless society, there will be no need for the state.

"Then there are political philosophers like Herbert Spenser, who regard the state as a necessary evil: evil because the state is rooted in fear and aggression, necessary because it is essential for maintaining the socio-economic order. Hence, they do not call for the abolition of the state but want to reduce its functions to a bare minimum. Hence, we have the philosophy of *laissez faire*, which has especially been applied to the realm of economics. At the other extreme are the philosophers like Hegel for whom the state is a divine institution, the march of God on earth, and the individual freedom consists in obedience to the state. For them the state can never do wrong. The Muslim political theory subordinates the state to religion, though the state is not regarded as a totalitarian institution. Now it's your turn," he invited the class.

Surprisingly, the first to raise his hand was Ali. "Yes go ahead," said Dr Junaid.

"Sir I have a question and anyone can answer it. Can there be political justification for terrorism?"

"I was expecting a comment not a question. Anyway, would anyone answer Ali's question?" Dr Junaid asked. "It can be the starting point of our discussion."

Ali's classmates looked at one another as no one seemed like answering the question.

"Come on boys and girls," remarked Dr Junaid. "It's not that difficult a question." Then sensing that the answer was not coming through, he said to Ali, "I'll appreciate if you yourself answer the question to set the ball rolling."

"In my view," said Ali, "there cannot be any justification for terrorism. No

doubt terrorism is a means of achieving some political objective, which may be perfectly legitimate but means cannot be justified simply because they seek to attain a legitimate objective."

"Why do you condemn terrorism?" asked Dr Junaid.

"Simply because terrorists kill innocent people," replied Ali.

"Well, if terrorists kill not the innocent people but the people who themselves are guilty of manslaughter, would then terrorism be an illegitimate act?" asked Dr Junaid.

"Taking of human life," replied Ali, "is always illegitimate. If someone is guilty of murder or some other heinous offence, let the law take its course and bring him to the book."

"But if the law is on the side of the guilty or the oppressor, what should the victims do?" asked Dr Junaid.

"They should wage struggle but by peaceful, constitutional means only. Ends however worthy or noble hardly justify means," Ali stuck to his position.

"The purpose of my cross questioning," said Dr Junaid looking at Ali, "was to elicit your views. Because you're otherwise shy and withdrawn, I'm glad that you have candidly expressed your thoughts on the subject."

Then addressing the class he said," Ali's position as I gather is that political ends however noble or lofty never justify means that are ignoble and illegitimate. This view has some significant implications: one, people cannot be deprived of their liberties in the name of a greater social good, national security or political necessity. Two, violence cannot be regarded as an acceptable way of settling political disputes. Three, democracy is the best form of government as democracy has unshakable faith in individual freedom and peaceful resolution of political disagreement and conflict. Do you agree?" he looked at Ali.

"Yes, I do," Ali nodded.

"Well," said Dr Junaid addressing the rest of the class, "this is Ali's position and you may not agree with him."

Sara joining the discussion said," Hardly anyone would disagree with the thesis that political conflict needs to be resolved by peaceful, constitutional means and that civil liberties need to be respected. However, the argument

cannot be pushed too far. Ali's position may hold water in an ideal world but then in such a world political disputes would not arise at all and individual freedom and political authority would perfectly be reconciled. But I'm afraid the real world we live in is far removed from such an idyllic state.

"In the real world, political conflict doesn't always lend itself to peaceful resolution and force may be the only solution. The various wars that have been waged since the dawn of civilization are a refutation of Ali's position. Moreover, if Ali's thesis were valid, revolutions would never take place because they signify failure to reconcile liberty and authority, freedom and social control. Taking an example from our own society, resort to terrorism is an evidence of the failure of political and constitutional machinery to settle political disputes as well as of the attempts to reconcile liberty and authority," Sara finished.

"Probably Sara has got me wrong. I never said or implied that political disputes are always settled peacefully and that there can never be a conflict between liberty and authority. No one can make such a sweeping statement. I was talking about these concepts in a normative way, while Sara was speaking about them in a positive sense," Ali defended himself.

"I think Ali has made his position amply clear," said Dr Junaid. Have you anything else to say Sara?"

"Even in a normative sense it will be a sweeping generalization to decry the use of force in all circumstances," Sara said. "When all doors to a political, constitutional change are closed, use of force may assume legitimacy. Again, with all my respect for democracy, I don't believe that it's the best form of govt. Democracy is based on the notion that the voice of the majority expressed through the ballot is always the voice of reason and sanity. This is as absurd a notion as the utilitarian view of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The greatest happiness of the greatest number or simply of the majority may consist in annihilation of the minority. Would we accept this as legitimate? In all fairness, the majority may be right in some situations but it may be on the wrong side of the truth in certain others. It all depends on circumstances and, like individuals, every set of circumstances is unique."

"So do you believe that in special circumstances violence may be justified?" asked Dr Junaid.

"Yes I do," replied Sara.

"Does it apply to the menace of terrorism that we are facing?" Dr Junaid asked.

Sara thought for a second and then said, “No sir, not in our case. The reason is that the change that the militants want to bring will be a change for the worse. They want to set up a totalitarian, monolithic, retrogressive, rigid and antiquarian political society without any program for economic emancipation of the people, social emancipation of women or political empowerment of the masses. We saw earlier that a similar political society was established by the Taliban in Afghanistan. That was a disaster. The use of force may be legitimate as a means but never as an end.”

“I strongly disagree with Sara’s characterization of the militancy, interposed Riaz. “The Taliban simply want to establish an Islamic political society for which our country was made. Their means may be questionable but this is the only option they have been left with.”

Before Sara could answer, Dr Junaid said, let’s move forward. “Do you think the state is an incarnation of good or is it a necessary evil?”

Naila raised her hand and after receiving a nod from the professor said: “The state is neither an embodiment of evil nor an incarnation of good. The state can promote freedom and it may suppress freedom. The state safeguards citizens against terrorism but it can perpetuate terrorism itself — the state terrorism as it’s called. The state is a vital social institution, for only it can create conditions conducive to a higher life. Even in a free market economy, where the least government is regarded as the best government, the state performs many useful functions, such as enforcing contracts, ensuring competition, providing for public goods, and feeding the old and the needy. It is hard to think of modern society working without the state. True, the functions of the state can increase or decrease, its role can enlarge or shrink, its powers can widen or narrow, but as an institution it is difficult to maintain that it will outlive its utility and wither away.”

“How many of you disagree with Naila?” asked Dr Junaid.

“I don’t say,” said Javed, “that I disagree with Naila. However, I do believe that it’s possible to conceive that the state can wither away. Many of the functions that the state once performed have been taken over by voluntary organizations. If we analyze the functions of the state, then it would appear that the essential and the foremost function of the state is to protect the life and property of the people. Private property is an artificial institution and it can conveniently be abolished by transferring the ownership from the individual to the entire community. This leaves us with only one essential function of the state — protection of citizens’ life. The danger to a person’s life springs from his fellows. It’s not inconceivable that the people are brought

up in such a manner that they respect the life and honor of their fellow citizens. Just as members of a family respect each others, not out of fear of law but voluntarily. Similarly, social pressure together with the realization that it's in the interest of all to respect one another's rights, as opposed to out of fear of the coercive authority of the state, can make people respect the life and honor of others."

"It's hard to believe this in the age of terrorism," dissented Naila. "Abolition of the state in any event is based on a too optimistic view of human nature."

"This is because of the misconception regarding the nature of the state," said Javed. "The state, it is still widely believed, is a natural institution. In fact, it's not. The basis of the state is a contract, not necessarily a formal contract, between the governors and the governed and this contract, like any other contract can be terminated if some other institution can perform the functions for which the contract was made."

"Let me inform you," interrupted Dr Junaid, "that we are approaching the end of this session. One question before we sign off: What do you think is the basis of state authority — consent or coercion?"

"Well sir it depends on the form of government. In democracy, it's consent, in despotism it's coercion," Sara replied.

"As I expected. But suppose in a democracy one fine morning I wake up and declare that I'll not pay taxes or obey other laws or regulations. What will the government do," Dr Junaid asked.

"You'll be put behind the bars," Sara replied almost spontaneously.

"Precisely," remarked Dr Junaid. "The authority of the state, regardless of the form of government, ultimately rests on its power to have its injunctions, laws, orders, regulations, whatever you call them, obeyed. If consent were the basis of political obedience, every one would be free to comply with or disregard the state commands. But this is neither possible nor desirable. So in the end coercion is the basis of political obedience. The difference between democracy and despotism is that in case of democracy there's an illusion that consent is the basis of state authority, whereas in case of despotism no such illusion exists."

"**So you met** Maulvi Zia," Ali said to Sara after the class.

"Yes I had an hour long meeting with him."

“What do you think of him?” Ali asked.

“It’s difficult to form an opinion about him in one meeting,” replied Sara. “The way he answered my questions seems he is quite learned and articulate a person. I’ll be meeting him again and may get some clue how my father is related to him.”

“How do you plan to proceed now?” Ali asked.

“I’ll meet Zia again in couple of days. But I need to be careful lest Dr Junaid should see me there,” Sara said. “I’m glad you took part in the discussion today.”

“Thanks. I’m trying to come out of my shell,” said Ali. “Besides, the subject was very interesting. But I’m sorry we had difference of opinion.”

“You don’t need to be apologetic about your views. I don’t take such things personally. By the way what else do you do?” Sara queried.

“I have no friends. I don’t have any hobby as such. I don’t like to watch TV either. Books are my only passion and my only companion. Most of the time in the evening, I stay at home. But I like to spend time with my family. My parents are my best friends.”

“This is much like myself, except that my father is too busy to spend time with me and my mother is not alive. If you don’t mind, may I meet your mother? You told me she is a lecturer.”

“Yes of course. You can meet her at your convenience. She too will be glad to see you. Yes she teaches political science in the Lahore College,” Ali replied.

“Ali,” said Sara in a low tone, “I have a personal question to ask you. You may not answer it if you don’t like.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“Is there a girl in your life? Anyone in the family?” Sara asked.

Ali blushing replied, “No,” but then hastened to add, “I have a relation named Farzana, who is just engaged. She’s the only girl in my family I’m familiar with. But there wasn’t anything between us. Somehow I cannot get along with girls.”

“But you are getting along fine with me,” Sara said with a smile.

“I hope so,” Ali blushed again prompting Sara to laugh.

“I like the way you blush. What are you plans for the future?” asked Sara

“Honestly I haven’t thought over that. Maybe I appear in the civil service examination, teach or take to journalism like my father. At the moment it’s all fluid. Of course I’ll have to do something to make a living,” Ali replied with the candidness characteristic of him. “What about you?” he asked Sara.

“Well, my father wants me to join his business. As my temperament is such that I cannot be an employee to anyone so I guess I’ll honor his desire. But like you, I’m not thinking about that at present,” Sara replied. Then looking at her mobile phone said, “Let’s go. Can I drop you home?”

“No thanks,” Ali replied. “I’ll take the college bus. With this, both rose and went their separate ways.

Chapter 12

The office bearers of the traders' association went to the White Mosque. They met Maulana Majeed and apprised him of the whole situation. "We request you to please stop your students from meddling into our business and in return we'll be pleased to do anything for you," they beseeched the *maulana*.

Maulana Majeed patiently heard the traders and then replied, "We don't mean any harm to you, rest assured. But we don't want any harm to society either. Therefore, my advice to you is to mend your ways and shut down your filthy businesses. As for your offer, we don't need anything from you. We look only to Allah Almighty for help and He has already blessed us with more than we deserve."

"But *maulana* two weeks are too short a time. Give us at least six months," the leader of the delegation Haji Bashir implored.

Maulana Majeed laughed and said, "If your intention is good, two weeks are a sufficient period. But if your intention is bad, even six years, what to talk of six months, are not sufficient. All I can concede to you is to give you another two weeks. So in all you have four weeks to mend your ways failing which I cannot guarantee the safety of your businesses. Forgive me it's time for *Asr* prayers. Would you join us?"

"Maulvi sahib," warned Haji Bashir, "we'll report the matter to the police."

"Go ahead. I know you grease the palm of the police. But we are not afraid of the police; even they will not be able to help you," said Maulana Majeed and rose from the chair.

"What should we do?" Haji Bashir consulted his colleagues as they came out of the premises of the White Mosque. "We should report the matter to the police," opined one of the traders. "We should not pin any hope on the clergy."

"What I don't understand is why the clergy have suddenly realized that running video or music shops is an evil. After all, we have been running our businesses for years and no one has objected to that," remarked another trader.

"I was of the view that the White Mosque administration wants to extort money from us. But the way Maulana Majeed has talked to us shows that it's not an issue of money. Why are they doing this is not important for us. What's

important for us is how to safeguard ourselves against possible action from the White Mosque students. And for this we need to approach the police," Haji Bashir summed up.

His views were endorsed by other members and a complaint was lodged with the local police station. The in charge of the police station assured the traders of full protection in exchange, of course, for "little favor".

Sara got next appointment for interview with Maulvi Zia. But this time she was asked to come at his farm house in the evening. It was the same farm house where she had earlier seen his father go inside.

"My name is Faiza and I have an appointment with Maulvi Zia sahib," Sara told the guard on duty at the main gate. He was not the same guard whom she had earlier met.

"Yes madam you can go inside," the guard told him respectfully.

Sara parked her car in the spacious compound and went towards the entrance. She was taken to Maulvi Zia's office by an attendant. Zia was not in the office and she was asked to wait for him. In a few minutes, Zia entered the room.

"*Assalam-o-alaikum,*" Zia addressed her.

"*Walaikim assalam*," Sara replied.

"I appreciate your punctuality," Zia said to her. "Did you find any difficulty in locating my residence?"

"Not really sir," Sara replied. "You happen to a well-known person.

"Would you like to have something or should we proceed straightaway?" Zia asked.

"No formalities sir," Sara replied. "I know your time is very precious; so I had better start my questions."

"As you wish," Zia twitched his shoulders.

"Sir, granted that the role of the *madaris* is as important as that of mainstream institutions, why is that students of the *madaris* come only of poor and low

income families, while children of affluent families are seldom enrolled in them?" Sara queried.

"A very good question," remarked Zia. "What you have said is a fact. But this is also a sad commentary on our society, which stubbornly refuses to give religion its due place. In a society where a person's worth is judged solely by the wealth that he has and where the affluent section of society has little to do with religion, religious education is scorned as good for nothing. Give religion its due place in society and you'll see that the cream of society is enrolled in the *madaris*. If you have studied Islamic history, you would recall that in its golden age when Muslims were the leaders of the world both militarily and intellectually, the best in the society were the graduates of the seminaries. So the decline of religious education is a principal cause of the political and intellectual decline of Muslims. Even in this materialistic age, the *madaris* are playing a very useful role by providing completely free of cost education to poor students, who otherwise would never be educated."

"Yes I appreciate the role of the *madaris* in providing free of cost education. However, the quality of education is also important. Are you satisfied with the quality of education provided in the *madaris* in general and the Jamia Islamia in particular," Sara asked.

"What is quality of education?" Maulvi Zia remarked with a grim smile. "When we say the quality of education, we define the word quality in a narrow sense. Our so-called intelligentsia believes that quality education is that which enables the students to get a good job, speak fluent English, and be self-assertive. Their definition of quality is out-and-out materialistic. Does the so-called quality education make students good Muslims, responsible citizens and conscientious members of society? It doesn't. Look at this country's leadership both past and present. They were educated in the institutions counted among the best in the world. They were self-assertive to the point of rudeness, confident to the point of arrogance, dressed meticulously and spoke flawless English. But did they use their knowledge and skills to the advantage of the people they were supposed to serve? No, they used their qualities, if I'm allowed to use this word, to the utter detriment of the people. The essential flaw was in their education and upbringing, which taught them to be successful only for themselves."

Maulvi Zia paused for a moment to capture his breath and then continued, "So the answer to your question is both in the affirmative and the negative. If you define quality only in the materialistic sense, then the answer is a 'No' and if you define quality in a wider sense, which I think should be the case, the answer is a big 'Yes'. Having said this, there's always room for improvement. And this is what we are doing at the Jamia. Our primary emphasis is on the

moral development of the students, because we believe that if this aspect is taken care of then education will achieve its objective."

"How do you ensure the moral development of your students," Sara enquired.

"Well, the entire curriculum is designed to produce this effect. "I'll give you a copy of the same and you can see for yourself. The classroom study is well supported by the routine in the Jamia. In fact, the teaching in the Jamia and other such institutions is not merely education' rather it's a way of life just like in a military academy."

"How would you respond to the allegation that the *madaris* are a breeding ground for militancy, that they inculcate hatred against rival creeds, and that they glorify death in the name of a noble cause?" That was Sara's next question.

"I categorically confute such allegations," said Maulvi Zia. "We do preach that the cause of religion is the noblest of all causes for which one should not be shy of rendering any sacrifice including of one's life. If you call it glorifying death, so be it. But it doesn't mean that we teach intolerance of other creeds and want their elimination by force. Yes Islam being the only true religion in which the salvation of mankind consists, we want it to be the universal creed. But this has to be done by preaching and persuasion, not by force and violence."

"But how would you account for the fact that many militant leaders have sprang up from the *madaris*?" Sara asked.

"Yes I take pride in the fact that the *madaris* have produced leaders who are committed to changing the society for the better. The fact that they have resorted to the use of force is only logical, because they were pushed to the wall and even a cat would attack its enemy if placed in such a situation what to talk about a devout Muslim. I give you an example. The Taliban, a product of the *madaris*, established a truly Islamic government in Afghanistan, which created order out of total chaos. But that government was forcibly removed by the anti-Islam West and their country was occupied by foreign forces. Now if the Taliban are fighting a guerilla war against the occupation forces, this is only natural because this is the only honorable option they have been left with. The other option, which is simply a disgrace, is meek surrender."
"One last question, said Sara, "Do you justify suicide terrorism?"

"Not at all. In the first place, even taking one's own life is unlawful in Islam. And in the second place, killing innocent people is equally unlawful." That was Maulvi Zia's answer.

“Thank you Maulvi sahib. It was nice and fruitful talking to you. I think I have got what I wanted but if still I have any queries, I’ll take the liberty of getting back to you,” Sara said.

“You are always welcome young lady,” remarked Maulvi Zia. “What are your plans? I mean how many days you are in the country and how much time would you take in completing your research work?”

Sara thought for a while and then said, “I’m here for another two weeks before I fly back. I may come back in a few months. My research is at the initial stage and will take at least another year.”

“Would you be kind enough to share your study with me after it has been completed?” Maulvi Zia asked

“Why not; it will be a pleasure.”

“Good. Maybe through your work, the West will have more informed knowledge of us, which will help remove some of their misconceptions,” observed Maulvi Zia.

As Ali returned home from the university, Farzana was talking to his mother. She was looking thin and pale. The sight of Farzana evoked at once feelings of remorse and pleasure in Ali.

“Hello Farzana. How are you?” he asked her.

“I’m fine,” she replied in a cold tone and rose from the chair.

“Where are you going?” Mrs Naqvi asked her. “The lunch is ready.”

“Ok,” Farzana assented.

Mrs Naqvi went to the kitchen and Farzana followed her, while Ali went to his room.

“You wanted to leave because of Ali,” Mrs Naqvi asked Farzana as she put the meal in the oven.

Farzana kept silent and tears rolled down her cheeks. “I understand that,” Mrs Naqvi said and hugged Farzana. “Sometimes, things don’t happen the way we

want. But this is not without some reason, though we don't always understand this. Anyway whatever happens expresses the will of God and is always for the better."

Mrs Naqvi tried to console Farzana with these words. But those words seemed hollow even to herself. After the meal was ready, the two ladies returned to the dining room, where Ali was seated with his head down.

"Are you ok?" Mrs Naqvi asked Ali.

"Yes, I'm, Ali answered as he rose his head. While dining, both Ali and Farzana kept silent but stole glances at each other. Mrs Naqvi, who was watching all that, felt that the two should be given a chance to speak in private. So after they had finished the lunch, she asked them to wait for her and left the room.

"Mother hasn't returned," remarked Ali to break the ice and then looking deeply into Farzana asked, "Are you happy?"

"Happy, for what?" she asked back.

"On your engagement."

"My being happy or not matters little," Farzana replied languidly. "I have to accept what others decide for me."

"I understand how you feel," Ali stated. "But believe me I decided what was best for us all. Besides, uncle Javed didn't like me and didn't approve of our match."

"There's no use speaking about these matters now," Farzana said in a sobbing voice. "Probably we were destined not to meet."

"Perhaps you are right," Ali replied. But then all of a sudden, he rose from the chair, took Farzana's hand and said in a trembling voice, "Forgive me for what I did and what I failed to do but believe it or not I love you." He then kissed her hand and rushed towards his room.

For a moment, Farzana was startled but then recovered and left the house in tears before Mrs Naqvi who had just entered the room with tea could stop her.

It was for the first time that Ali had confessed his love for Farzana. She returned home in utter disbelief like a terminally ill person who having abandoned all hopes to recover suddenly sees a glimmer of hope.

“Is it possible?” she questioned herself. “If Ali loves me then I can fight the whole world for him. But what should I do? I’m engaged and father has planned my marriage in a few months. He will never agree to have my engagement dissolved at least not for Ali. He’ll plainly tell me that it’s a point of honor for him and that he’ll honor his word to uncle Aziz at all cost. The only person who can plead my case is Aunt Fatima. But she has already done a lot for me. Then suddenly an idea flashed in her mind. Shouldn’t I talk to Rashid — my fiancé. He has been educated abroad and he’ll certainly appreciate my predicament. But should I give him a complete account? Yes I should talk to him and see how he reacts.” Having reached that decision, Farzana felt herself lightened.

On the other hand, Ali was at a loss how to account for his behavior with Farzana, the way he had kissed her and the way he had confessed of his love for her.

“May be it was a slip of the tongue and a slip of the lips,” he thought. “But I know such slips are not out of nothing. They express our innermost desires. Does it mean I’m really in love with Farzana? But love, is not it the most futile of all passions? As the poet Ghalib says, love is the malady of the mind. Ok, love is spontaneous. But its expression can be controlled. Even if I love Farzana, there’s no reason I should marry her. I may fall in love with another girl. But it doesn’t mean I shall marry her as well. It’s not necessary that love should be translated into a permanent relationship. In any case, Farzana is engaged with someone else and not before long she’ll be married to that person. So I had better not think about her.”

Book 2

Chapter 13

The country was ravaged by bomb blasts in all the major cities. The explosions were carried out at places ranging from mosques to markets, campuses to public offices. The government earned adverse criticism for its failure to protect the people.

It was in such circumstances that political parties in the opposition led by Malik Naseem announced to present a no-confidence motion against the prime minister. The decision was announced by Malik Naseem at a press conference in the capital. In a hard-hitting speech, he lambasted the government for its failure to give security to the people, provide jobs to the youth, give honor to women and redress problems of the masses. "This government is an abject failure and the sooner it's removed, the better it would be for the country," was his concluding remark. "Now I'' take your questions, he invited the media persons.

"Malik sahib I'm from *Daily News*. It's alleged that you have indulged in horse trading to win the loyalty of ruling party parliamentarians. How do you rebut this charge?" asked a journalist.

"Such allegations are absolutely unfounded and *mala fide*. No doubt, we have the support of some ruling party members but they are supporting us of their own accord. We have offered them nothing," declared Malik Naseem. "Next question please."

"In case you form the government, what will be your policy with regard to religious militancy?" enquired another journalist.

"Militancy has assumed serious proportions for which I blame the present government, because it failed to address the problems underlying militancy, like unemployment, underdevelopment and poverty. My government will address these problems on priority and I'm confident we'll be able to contain the militancy," Malik Naseem answered.

"Would you call off the military operation against the militants?" asked a veteran journalist.

"My answer to your question is that I'll cross the bridge when I come to it."

"Forgive me sir but this is not the answer to my question. Your reply shows that you have no counter-militancy policy," observed the journalist who was not satisfied with the way Malik Naseem had evaded the question.

"We do have a policy on militancy," replied Malik Naseem trying to control his anger. "And rest assured that it will be a far better policy than that of the present government. But we'll announce the same only after our government has been installed. The same goes for the military operation."

"Malik sahib it's alleged that pro-militancy forces are behind the efforts to dislodge the government. Is it correct?"

"I don't know who the pro-militancy forces are and in any event we have nothing to do with these forces. An in-house change is part of parliamentary democracy and the reason that we want to remove the government I have already explained at length. Thank you very much."

With these words Malik Naseem left the scene along with his party colleagues and guards.

Sara had met Maulvi Zia twice but was still unsure of the connection between him and her father. All she suspected was that Maulvi Zia was exercising some control over Seth Nisar. Her interaction with Maulvi Zia had made her believe that he was committed to a religious cause.

"Definitely, he needs a lot of money for his seminaries and maybe papa is one of the contributors. But why is he doing this? I know papa; he is committed only to his business and so he cannot be associated with a religious cause," Sara reasoned.

Again, her conclusion was that Maulvi Zia was exploiting some weakness of Seth Nisar. But what that weakness was, she was still in the dark.

Another question which agitated her mind was the connection between Maulvi Zia and Dr Junaid. Apparently, they were men of different, if not contrasting, worlds. "But appearances can be deceptive. If papa and Zia can be connected, Dr Junaid and Zia can also be. Does that mean Dr Junaid like papa is also in the control of Zia for a similar reason? And maybe papa and Dr Junaid are also connected. Though all this is shrouded in uncertainty, one thing is clear — Maulvi Zia is a dangerous person," she concluded.

As Sara saw it, two courses were open to her. One was to seek the help of Hassan Naqvi, Ali's father, to find the answers to her questions. Ali had already offered her that help. The other option was to do it all alone. The second option she had hitherto exercised but without tangible success. So she decided to seek the help of Ali's father.

Next day after the final class, she took Ali to a corner and said to him, "Ali few weeks back you told me that your father can help me find out the relationship between my father and Maulvi Zia. Can he really do something?"

"Yes, of course," Ali replied. "But he may need to know all that we know."

"Yes I understand," Sara assented. "Can you take me to your father? I will tell him all that he needs to know."

"Ok, I'll talk to him and then arrange your meeting with him," Ali told Sara.

Next day, Ali took Sara to Mr Naqvi's cabin in his office. "Father it's Sara I told you about."

"Good to see you," Mr Naqvi said with a cheery face, and mentioned Sara to a chair. "Ali told me about you. Anything I can do for you?"

Sara told her all that she knew about Maulvi Zia and her father, her meetings with Maulvi Zia, with the request for absolute confidentiality. She also told him that she had seen Dr Junaid in the Jamia.

Mr Naqvi attentively listened to her. "In the first place let me assure you that whatever you have shared with me would remain a closely guarded secret. You need not worry on that account. In the second place, I'm well familiar with Maulvi Zia. Apart from running seminaries, he has links with militant organizations. In fact, several frontline militants regard him as their *guru*, if I'm allowed to use that word. Maulvi Zia's activities are funded by rich and influential people both within and without the country for one reason or another. And your father Seth Nisar is one of those people. Now we have to find out the reason why your father is supporting Zia. You told me he's not a religious person so he is not supporting him out of any conviction. My hunch like you is that he's blackmailing your father."

"What do you think Dr Junaid has to do with Maulvi Zia?" Sara asked.

"Dr Junaid is a relation of Maulvi Zia. They are cousins if I'm not wrong," Mr Naqvi explained. "Whether Dr Junaid has anything to do with Maulvi Zia's movement, I'm not aware of that."

"Oh I see!" exclaimed both Sara and Ali. "They are cousins, but they seem to be poles apart. The one is a liberal; the other is a *maulvi*," Sara observed.

"Well there's nothing strange about that," Mr Naqvi observed. "Even real

brothers can be poles apart. I have my sources and I'll try to find out the relationship between Seth Nisar and Zia. Meanwhile, you should keep away from Maulvi Zia for he can harm you if he comes to know that you are Seth Nisar's daughter and are spying on him. He's a very ruthless person. I hope you haven't given him your contact number."

"No sir I haven't," Sara replied. "But I'll follow your advice and wouldn't see him again."

"Ok you may go home and behave normally with your father. I'll get back to you as soon as I've some news for you," Mr Naqvi told Sara and bade her *adieu*.
"I'm thankful to you for this," Sara said to Ali as they left Mr Naqvi's office. "Your father seems to be a very considerate person."

"You are always welcome Sara. We'll do all that we can do for you. But you must follow my father's advice and shouldn't visit Zia again."

"I'll," Sara assured Ali as she unlocked her car. Ali returned to his father's office, who had earlier told him that he had finished his work and they could leave for home together.

"**It was a** nice press conference," Maulvi Zia told Malik Naseem as he visited the latter's residence located in the most expensive part of the capital.

"Thanks," Malik Naseem replied with a big smile. "God willing, in less than two weeks I'll be the country's prime minister."

I trust you'll not disappoint us," Maulvi Zia said.

"Certainly not. I'll owe my position to you and you'll get all you want," Malik Naseem assured.

"Anything that we can do for you?" Maulvi Zia asked.

"You have already done a lot. But you have one more thing to do." Malik Naseem paused for few seconds and then resumed, "I want you to speak to our new allies from the ruling party. I believe something weighs on their conscience for changing their loyalty. You will address them and tell them that by helping us remove this government, they are doing a great service to our religion and the country and that our struggle is not for power but for the glory of Islam."

"I got your point," Maulvi Zia said with a nod. "They need to have an injection of religion to cure their doubts. For this I'm at your service. But where are our new friends?"

"We have removed them to a safe haven. We have reports from our friends in intelligence agencies that the government is after them and will try to get them away. We'll bring them out on the day the no-confidence motion is put to vote," Malik Naseem explained.

"I have planned to remain in the capital for another couple of days but I can extend my stay as you need me," Maulvi Zia told Malik Naseem.

"Please stay for another four days. You may be required to address the parliamentarians day after tomorrow and then we'll see whether one address is sufficient," Malik Naseem said.

"As you say. I take your leave now."

After his meeting with Malik Naseem, Zia drove straight to the White Mosque, where he was received by Maulana Majeed. The *maulana* told Zia about their students' ultimatum to the traders and the latter's request that they should be given more time to change their businesses.

"These bastards don't deserve any concession; they have already made religious injunctions into a joke. You have given them another two weeks, it's ok. But if they don't mend their ways, our students should forcibly get their businesses closed down," Maulvi Zia told Maulana Majeed in so many words.

"But *maulana* sahib, there is going to be a change in the government. Shouldn't we wait for the new government to itself have these filthy businesses closed," Majeed opined.

"You're very naïve Majeed. Do you think, closing down these businesses would be a priority for the new government? Certainly not. In any case, we'll ask Malik Naseem to make some strategic decisions, such as calling off the military operation against the *mujahideen*. The actions of lesser importance we can take care of ourselves," Maulvi Zia pronounced.

"I'm sorry *maulana* sahib. I didn't understand that," an abashed Majeed expressed his regrets.

"It's all right. If you could comprehend such things, you would be in my place," Maulvi Zia told Majeed with a sarcastic smile.

"What about Mrs Khan? Would you like to meet her?" Majeed asked.

"I would love to meet her but not for the present. The request for a meeting should come from her and it would definitely come. For the time being, let her business thrive and let her bask in her success," Maulvi Zia observed. "I'll like to have dinner in fifteen minutes," he added.

Farzana rang up Rashid and requested that they meet. Rashid was surprised at Farzana's call but agreed to see her in a restaurant. Farzana had seen Rashid's photograph, so when she reached the restaurant, she had no problem in recognizing him.

Rashid was about thirty years of age, dark, tall and good-looking. He was wearing a lounge suit. "If I'm not mistaken, you are Rashid," Farzana queried as she reached his table.

"And you must be Farzana, "Rashid replied as he stood up as a sign of courtesy and mentioned her to a chair.

"Shall I order something for you," Rashid asked Farzana after looking intensely at her. He was impressed by her looks.

"Tea will be fine," Farzana replied and Rashid ordered tea for both. Thereafter both sank into silence.

"You must be wondering why I have called you here," Farzana broke the ice.

"Yes I'm thinking about that since you called me yesterday. I can only guess that there's some important business you want to talk," Rashid said.

"Yes it's for both of us," Farzana replied in a low voice. Before she could speak more, the waiter intruded with tea.

"I don't know what you are going to say but at least you have given me the pleasure of your company," Rashid began after the waiter had left. "And I must say you are prettier than I had imagined. I myself wanted to meet you so that we may get to know each other before we tie the nuptial knot. But I was shy of inviting you lest you may not like it. But thank God, you created that opportunity yourself. Oh forgive me I talk too much. You were going to say something..."

Farzana liked Rashid's frankness. She also felt sorry for him because what she was going to say would definitely hurt him. "Rashid sahib you will agree with me that the people who are going to be married should be honest with each

other," she said.

"Yes I cannot agree with you more."

"The fact is that I'm in love with another person."

"What! Rashid exclaimed. But then controlled himself and asked who that lucky person was.

"His name is Ali and he is related to me," Farzana replied.

"Does he love you as well?" Rashid asked

"Yes."

"But then why you were engaged to me and not to him."

"Actually, father doesn't like him."

"I wouldn't ask why uncle Javed doesn't like him. For me it's sufficient to know that you like him. But what you want me to do?"

"I would request you to dissolve our engagement. I would have done it myself. But father wouldn't approve of that."

"But what reason should I give. Moreover, even if I don't marry you, it doesn't mean that your father would allow you to marry Ali considering that he doesn't like him. Look Farzana, I respect your feelings. But it's not that easy a proposition. Let me think over it and I'll get back to you shortly."

Chapter 14

"There's nothing in the world that can be called good without qualification except good will. This is the crux of Kant's moral philosophy. What it implies is that goodness of an action depends essentially on the intention or motive of the doer. Take an example from Kant himself: a person may give charity because he wants publicity or lacks the courage to turn down the request. In either case, an otherwise good action will be divested of its ethical character. Now I invite your discussion on the ethical criterion of our actions," said Prof Najeeb.

"There's a marked similarity between the Kantian view and the teachings of Islam. In Islam as well, ethical character of an action depends on intentions. So I fully agree with Kant's view," declared Riaz.

"Intentions or motives are important no doubt. But making them the sole criterion of judging the ethical character of actions is open to several objections," Sara opined. "In the first place, it's not always possible to know why an action was carried out even for the doer. And if Freud is to be believed, the motives which determine our actions are essentially unconscious and are rooted in either sex or aggression instinct. In that event, all actions are equally good or bad. Secondly, consequences of an action are also very important. If an action contributes to social good, it's a moral action regardless of the intentions behind it. In a court of law, intentions are difficult to prove and the punishment mainly depends on the consequences."

"I'm afraid Sara's analysis is faulty," Riaz objected. "For one thing, in a court of law, intentions are also taken into account. For instance, if Sara kills another person to save her honor, she may be acquitted. There's a difference between cold blooded murder and killing in self defense. Similarly, there is clearly a difference between a premeditated murder and unintentional killing and between them the enormity of the punishment varies. As for the Freudian theory, it's simply an over-simplification. While sexual and aggression instincts do play a part in out actions, human nature is too complex and impulses too several in number."

Prof Najeeb intervening said, "Both Riaz and Sara agree that intentions and consequences bear upon ethical character of an action. However, they differ only in emphasis. Let's move forward. We suppose that an action is good if it's actuated by right motives and produces right consequences. There are then two questions: one, what is right action? Two, why should a person do what's right. Granted that we agree on what constitutes the right action, the problem that we may consider now is why a person should perform that act.

"It depends on the psychology of moral action," Naila opined. "We are actuated either by desires — conscious or unconscious — or by sense of duty. Sometimes, our desires and sense of duty are in harmony; at times they are in conflict. Even in presence of a desire to the contrary, a person will do what's right if he has a strong sense of duty. While a serial killer may take people's life to satisfy his drive for aggression or hatred, a terrorist kills people because he has a strong sense of duty."

"Killing with a sense of duty! I don't agree," Sara remarked. "In fact, what is considered to be a sense of duty is disguised desire. For the terrorist, the so-called sense of duty is at bottom the desire to enter into paradise. Therefore, whether a person will do what's right is contingent upon strength of his desires. And of course, right and wrong are relative terms. What's right for the suicide bomber is wrong for society at large."

"Relativity of right and wrong is nonsense," Naila asserted. "An action is either right or wrong; it cannot be both. Nor can it be right for me and wrong for Sara. The terrorist does consider his actions to be right but this is a wrong perception on his part. Besides, I protest against equating sense of duty with unconscious desire. If everyone is actuated by desires only, what difference is left between a man of high ethical standards and one who is at a very low level of morality? In fact, the ability to transcend one's desires and do one's duty is the hallmark of a strong character."

"Naila may be right but so far we have ignored the relationship between morality and freedom," taking part in the discussion Ali said. "To me, the foremost ethical question is whether the individual is free. For if I'm not free to choose my actions and if they are predetermined or preordained, the whole discussion becomes devoid of meaning."

"Ali has raised a very important question," Prof Najeeb noted. "However, the question of freedom belongs more to metaphysics than to ethics. Even if man is not free, we can assess his actions to be good or bad depending upon their consequences and the circumstances. However, logically if man is not free, he cannot be held responsible for his actions, though the actions can still be categorized as right or wrong. There have been quite a few philosophers of note who believed in absolute determinism but held strong ethical views. The foremost among them is Benedict Spinoza and I'm sure you all are well familiar with him."

"Yes sir I have had the privilege of reading Spinoza's work," Ali replied. "But to me freedom of choice is a necessary postulate for morality. If we can think, feel and act only one way either because God has willed this from all eternity or because the world is mechanically made like that, what's the qualitative

difference between the actions of a saint and those of a sinner? In that event, the suicide bomber is as helpless as his victims."

"Ali you are disregarding the consequences of actions. Our actions produce some effects whether or not we are free. If the effects are good, the actions are also good," Sara opined.

"But if the individual is not free, how can we credit him for good actions and discredit him for bad actions?" Ali insisted.

"Ethics is not essentially about crediting or discrediting people for their acts of omission and commission. It's about understanding what's good or bad conduct," Prof Najeeb tried to answer Ali.

"Of what use is understanding if one cannot mould one's character?"

"We can mould our conduct if we understand it," the professor replied.

"We can mould our conduct only if we are free," Ali was not willing to give in.

"Whether we are free or not is difficult to prove. In the ultimate analysis, as Spinoza said, freedom may be an illusion because we are not aware of the causes of our actions. However, this is no time to discuss the problem of freedom," Prof Najeeb remarked.

"According to Islam, man has been given the knowledge of good and evil as well as freedom to choose between them. Man is therefore responsible for his deeds. Probably Christianity and other great religions have similar views. I agree with Ali that the possibility of ethics is based on the affirmation of freedom. For what is moral behavior if it is not responsible behavior and the notion of responsibility is meaningless without freedom," Riaz re-entered the discussion.

"Ethics is a science and every science is based on a deterministic philosophy," Sara said. "Every effect has a cause, which in turn is the effect of another cause and so on. *Prima facie*, the law of causation is antithesis of freedom. Is there a possibility that freedom and determinism can be reconciled?"

"Determinism is a fact of life," Prof Najeeb remarked. "Events don't occur out of nothing; rather there's always a cause behind them. I didn't want to discuss the question of freedom. But you have drawn me into this discussion. We'll discuss this problem in detail some other time. All I can say before we sign off is that it is possible to reconcile freedom and determinism. We may

be free to choose between alternatives but our choice is determined by antecedent factors, such as our character and our circumstances. Give two people the same alternatives in a similar situation but they may choose differently because they are different characters. Even the same person may choose differently in different circumstances. That's why we have divergent doctrines, philosophies and schools: capitalism and communism, individualism and socialism, fascism and anarchism, liberalism and conservatism — each trying to solve the same set of problems in its own fashion, that is to say, choosing different alternatives.

Chapter 15

The no-confidence motion against the Prime Minister was carried through in parliament and Malik Naseem being the opposition leader was invited by the president to form the government. Malik Naseem's supporters celebrated their victory all over the country. Religious parties in particular welcomed the change of guards. It was expected that the new government would reverse the out-going government's counter-terrorism policy, as Malik Naseem and his party were staunch critics of that policy and had demanded a peace agreement with the militants.

Maulvi Zia was amongst the first to congratulate Malik Naseem on his appointment as prime minister and reminded him of his promises. Malik Naseem renewed his assurances. However, hours before he was to be sworn in premier, Malik Naseem received a note from the chief of the armed forces asking him to meet him immediately.

"Congratulations Malik Naseem," the army chief greeted him as the former called on the latter at his residence.

"But for your concurrence it wouldn't have been possible sir," Malik Naseem acknowledged.

"It was very hard convincing our western allies to change horses in the midstream. But we brought home to them that the outgoing government didn't have the capability to defeat militants and that your government will continue the counter terrorism campaign. We know that you have contacts with religious outfits and that you will influence them to our advantage," the general told Malik Naseem.

"I'm your most loyal servant sir and if to anyone I owe this position, it's you sir," Malik Naseem flattered the general. "Rest assured, I'll follow your diktat. The policy will be yours and implementation will be mine. This evening, after taking oath, I'll be addressing the nation on television — a convention you know. What should I say about counter terrorism since of late I have been speaking against it on and on, of course only to malign my predecessor?"

"Don't worry about that. We have prepared a brief for you, which you should use in your address. There's no need to expatiate on counter terrorism. All you should say is that your government will look into and improve upon the policies of your predecessor. This is enough for now," the general said and rose from his chair. "I'm afraid but it's time for me to play golf. Oh it reminds me. The American ambassador will see you after you have been sworn in."

The important question before Rashid was where Ali stands in the whole equation. For if he was not committed to Farzana, their chapter was closed. So he decided to talk to Ali to ascertain his position. The two subsequently met in a café.

After their introduction was complete, Rashid began, "Let's waste no time and come to the point. I'm engaged to Farzana but she wants to marry you. So where do you stand?"

Ali was taken by surprise at the question, as he was not expecting that stuff. Instead of answering him, he looked at Rashid rather nervously.

"Have I asked too difficult a question?" Rashid queried.

"Yes. No. I mean to say that Farzana is engaged to you and it's for you two to decide."

"But she is in love with you."

"It's one thing to love someone and quite another to marry her," Ali picking up his confidence said. Farzana is a nice girl and I have all the respect for her. But I'm not prepared for marriage and would not be so in another few years. Even if I were to agree, her father wouldn't consent to our marriage. So you had better make Farzana understand our predicament. You seem to be a nice person, who I'm sure has a bright career ahead of him. You'll make a good match for her and I wish you a successful nuptial life."

"But do you love Farzana?" Rashid queried.

"I don't know why you are asking this. But let me assure you there's nothing between us. Our relationship, if there has ever been any, is at best Platonic," Ali clarified.

"Forgive me, but this wasn't my intention. I have no doubts as to Farzana's character. I asked that question out of curiosity rather than out of suspicion. But if you don't want to reply, I'll not press you," Rashid explained.

Ali after some moments of silence said, "What's love; it's hard to define. Does mere likeness constitute love? Does love mean total submission to the beloved? I don't know. But if love means, as it is generally understood, strong affinity between two people who find it hard to live apart, then I can say without the slightest hesitation that I don't love Farzana. Look Rashid, Farzana is very innocent and like other innocent people, she is a bit remote

from reality. She needs a practical and strong man like you and not a confused and impractical person like me. The fact that you have called me here shows that you also care about her. Please show her the light of reason and facts. I'm sure once married to you, she'll forget me completely," holding Rashid's hand Ali implored him.

"I appreciate how you feel for Farzana. Of course I'll do what I can to persuade her but I wouldn't force her to marry me against her will. As things stand, I don't know what future has in store for us. But I'm sure in you I have found a nice person," Rashid told Ali.

After his swearing-in, Malik Naseem was told by his military secretary that the American ambassador was waiting for a call on him. "Of course, I'll see him immediately," he replied.

"Congratulations Mr Prime Minister and thank you for consenting to meet me," the ambassador remarked as Malik Naseem entered the room along with his military secretary. "I just wanted to convey the warm greetings of the government and people of the United States of America on your appointment to this high office as well as their best wishes for you to succeed."

"Thanks a lot Your Excellency," Malik Naseem replied. "My government will attach the highest importance to strengthening bilateral relations with your country."

"You are welcome Mr Prime Minister. The President and his administration are looking forward to closely working with your government and increase our engagement with your country. But before we move forward, I have some submissions to make," the ambassador said.

"Yes I'm all ears."

"Our first request is that the outgoing government's counter terrorism policy may continue. We have reports that some of the religious outfits backing the Taliban are your close associates and that you promised to immediately halt the military operation against them after coming into power. Now that you are in the saddle, we hope that you'll not oblige them," the ambassador said curtly. "Doing so would be detrimental to your interest as well as ours."

"I have association with religious outfits and I did promise them to stop the operation against the militants. But as Your Excellency would appreciate, such promises are of political nature and are not always meant to be fulfilled. I assure you that my government will continue to fight militancy with might

and main. The change in government will not result in change of policy. Rather I'll use my contacts with religious outfits to prevail upon the militants to lay down their arms unconditionally. I hope your government will continue to assist my government as it did the previous government," Malik Naseem explained.

"Yes of course. If you help us, we'll also help you. I know you will be addressing your people shortly so I should better take your leave. One last thing: Our president will give you a call — maybe tomorrow. Please also assure him of your unflinching commitment to counter terrorism. This will be a good beginning of your personal relations with him," the ambassador advised the new premier.

"With pleasure," Malik Naseem assured his distinguished guest, as he rose to see him off. "I'll be throwing a party tomorrow evening and you are cordially invited to that."

"Thanks for the invitation. I'll definitely make it."

Chapter 16

"How do you see the change in the government father?" Ali asked Mr Naqvi as they finished with their dinner.

"Well, there are different ways of looking at it," Mr Naqvi began. "In parliamentary system, just as ours, the government has to command the majority of the members of parliament and it may be thrown out of office if it ceases to command the majority. So in that sense, there's nothing odd about the change in govt. But this is merely a textbook explanation. No doubt, there has been a great deal of horse trading but again it's part of our political culture. What's surprising for me is not the change in government *per se* but that Malik Naseem is heading the new govt. He is well known for his contacts with religious organizations, which are at the back of the Taliban. But then why the powers that be — I mean the army and the Americans—have acquiesced in this?

"What is your opinion Hassan?" Mrs Naqvi also joined the discussion.

"One possible explanation is that Malik Naseem is playing a double game. He used votes and money of religious parties to topple the government by promising them to reverse the counter terrorism policy and make peace with the militants. On the other hand, he assured the establishment that his government would continue the operation against the Taliban," Mr Naqvi opined.

"But what would he do?" Mrs Naqvi queried. "Of course he cannot have it both ways."

"Yes you're right," Mr Naqvi nodded. "It wouldn't be possible for Malik Naseem to ditch the establishment. So he will have to dump the clergy."

"Would it not affect his political support and credibility?" Ali asked.

"It will no doubt. But Malik Naseem is a crafty politician. He'll also try to appease the clergy and tell them in so many words that in case they withdraw their support to him, then it will bring the outgoing government back to power. The clergy wouldn't like the former ruling party to be back in power. Besides, within the establishment, there is a strong section which has a soft corner, if not all out support, for the militants. So he'll try to manipulate the connection between that section of the establishment and the clergy. That said, there would hardly be a smooth sailing for Malik Naseem and he'll have to put in all his political acumen to handle the situation," Mr Naqvi explained.

Meanwhile, Mrs Naqvi left the room to offer prayers leaving the two gentlemen there. “By the way, Seth Nisar, Sara’s father, contributed a hefty amount to the victory of Malik Naseem and he did so at the behest of Maulvi Zia. But I haven’t been able to find out why the seth is so loyal to the *maulvi*,” Mr Naqvi informed Ali.

“So there is a nexus between the clergy, the capitalists and politicians,” Ali said.

“Yes there is and you may add journalists, bureaucrats and intelligence agencies to the nexus.”

In a few minutes, Mrs Naqvi re-joined the conversation. Being a lecturer in political science, she was particularly interested in political developments in the country. “Hassan why do you think the army and the Americans consented to the change in government?” she asked.

“I have also been thinking over this and have yet to come up with a definite answer. But since you have asked this question, let’s speculate on this. The outgoing government had liberal credentials and was committed to fighting militancy. However, because of some political constraints it was not fully able to translate that commitment into practice and therefore could not come up to the expectations of the Americans. Besides, a strong section in the armed forces didn’t like the ruling party because of its liberal, populist credentials. This section, I can at best conjecture, prevailed over the top brass to allow change in the govt. I don’t believe that the army engineered the change in government; it only consented to that and allowed Malik Naseem and his allies to prove their strength in parliament. If I correctly understand Pakistani politics, premature change in the government is to the army’s advantage, because it doesn’t allow any civilian government to become strong enough to pose a challenge to the army’s pre-eminent position.”

“Your reasoning seems to be valid. But how did Americans accept the change in government?” Mrs Naqvi enquired.

“I think at times we tend to exaggerate the influence of America on our politics. Americans no doubt exercise a lot of influence on our politics but there are also limits to that. And the greatest limit is the army itself. Americans have always found it convenient to influence Pakistani politics through the army. So in the ultimate analysis, American influence on our politics depends on what the army thinks and is willing to do. So, at times, Americans have to adjust their policies accordingly. Hence, once the army had decided in principle to allow Malik Naseem to topple the government, the Americans were made to accept that; of course with the understanding that the

counter terrorism campaign would continue. But as I earlier said, it's all conjecture based upon my journalistic experience and conversation with some leading political figures," Mr Naqvi explained.

"This seems to me a plausible explanation," Mrs Naqvi acknowledged. "But how do you see the future of Malik Naseem?"

"The simple answer my dear is that like any other politician, the future of Malik Naseem hinges on how he gets along with the army. As long as he plays second fiddle to the army, he'll be tolerated and even supported. But the moment he begins to assert himself, life would become difficult for him," Mr Naqvi opined and then looking at his watch said, "Malik Naseem will be appearing on television in half an hour, let's watch him and see what he has to say. But before this, let's go out for a short stroll."

Malik Naseem's address to the nation contained nothing of substance. He promised to give an efficient and clean government, serve the people, promote friendly relations with Muslim countries, give shape to the economy, and safeguard the country's geographical and ideological frontiers. He hardly mentioned the counter-terrorism policy except that his government will review all policies of its predecessor including the fight against militancy.

Probably no one listened to the new prime minister's speech with greater keenness and attention than Maulvi Zia. And probably no one was more disillusioned with the address than he. As soon as the speech finished, he tried to contact Malik Naseem, but was told by his staff that he was not available and that they would forward the message to him.

The night was spent by Maulvi Zia waiting for Malik Naseem's return call and thinking why he had broken his promise to him. In the morning, the first thing he did was to fly to the capital. He had read in the newspaper that the new prime minister would host a reception in honor of his allies. But to Maulvi Zia's surprise he received no invitation. His attempts to contact Malik Naseem received the same response as was the case the night before.

From the airport Maulvi Zia drove straight to the residence of a common friend, named Sharif Khan, who was tipped to join the cabinet of Malik Naseem.

"Since last night I have been trying to contact Malik Naseem but in vain," Maulvi Zia complained to Sharif Khan."

"It should not be a cause for concern for you," observed Sharif Khan. "Malik

Naseem is now the prime minister and he must be receiving messages of felicitation from all over the world. I think he'll contact you at the first opportunity."

"But he hasn't invited me to this evening's reception either," Maulvi Zia lodged another complaint.

"Well that may be an act of omission on the part of his staff. But you don't worry, we'll go together to the reception," Sharif Khan tried to appease Maulvi Zia.

In the evening, Maulvi Zia along with Sharif Khan drove to the prime minister's house. Not only politicians, but foreign diplomats were also invited to the reception. Understandably, the new prime minister was the centre of attention. Maulvi Zia went to Malik Naseem and greeted him. The latter acknowledged his greetings.

Maulvi Zia was impatient to talk to him about his address last evening but realized it was not the proper occasion. Maulvi Zia was on personal terms with some envoys from Muslim countries, who were also present there. They congratulated him on the election of Malik Naseem. Maulvi Zia also had a brief chat with the American ambassador.

Suddenly, it was announced that the army chief General Obaid had arrived. Malik Naseem himself went to the main entrance to receive the general, who was in civilian dress and was undoubtedly the un-acclaimed chief guest of the event. Every one present in the reception wanted to talk or at least shake hand with the general. Though he addressed Malik Naseem as 'sir' and as respectfully as it is possible for a Pakistani general to address a civilian, it didn't require a genius to guess who the real master was. The general, who was the last to arrive at the reception, was the first to leave. He was followed by the American ambassador and other guests.

Maulvi Zia and Sharif Khan also decided to leave. They went to Malik Naseem to say him good-bye. As at that time Malik Naseem was alone, Sharif Khan complained to him that his staff had forgotten to invite Maulvi Zia to the reception.

"I'm extremely sorry for that Maulvi sahib. As we're new to each other, they don't really know who my friends are," Malik Naseem explained.

"It's all right," Maulvi Zia said in a rather cold tone. "We all make mistakes."

"I know you have a lot to talk to me. Could we meet tomorrow?" Malik

Naseem asked him. And without waiting for an answer he said, "My staff will tell you the exact time."

"Ok," Maulvi Zia assented.
"Didn't I tell you that Malik Naseem is a friend of friends? Now when you meet him tomorrow, frankly tell him what you want," Sharif Khan told Maulvi Zia as they drove back to his residence.

"I just want him to fulfill the promises he made to me," Maulvi Zia replied.

"He'll certainly do so," Sharif Khan said. "Just give him some time. The list of the new ministers will be finalized by tomorrow, I suppose. Do you have any nominee?"

"No, not at the moment. But I guess you are certain to make it."

"Yes I have been offered the portfolio of tourism. But I have told Malik Naseem that it's a useless ministry. A country ravaged by the war on terror is no place to attract foreign tourists."

"But then which ministry are you eyeing?" Maulvi Zia queried.

"I want either the ministry of industries or the commerce ministry. Both ministries are very lucrative. Zia sahib let me state it frankly. For me politics is the art of earning money and I'm in politics only for this. Serving the people and the country is meant only for public consumption." Sharif Khan was candid.

"I appreciate your frankness, though I don't agree with you that politics is meant for earning money. To me, politics is an instrument of serving religion. I'm in politics to promote the cause of Islam," Maulvi Zia explained.

"Though I offer my prayers regularly, I'm not a religious person like you," Sharif Khan said.

"You didn't tell me what did Malik Naseem say in response to your demand for a ministry of your choice?" Maulvi Zia enquired.

"He told me these two ministries were in high demand. You know taking part in elections is a very expensive business. My election campaign cost me at least 20 million rupees. The same goes for most other parliamentarians. Far from serving the people, politics is an investment, where you want handsome return on your capital. So at the moment there is intense competition for ministerial slots." Sharif Khan said.

"You are very close to Malik Naseem. Do you think his government will terminate the operation against the militants?" Maulvi Zia asked.

"I really don't know for the simple reason that I'm not interested in that. But being a Pathan, I can safely tell you that the militants would never lay down their arms. If forced to make a choice, they would prefer death to surrender."

"Actually I was expecting that Malik Naseem would immediately announce the end of the military operation, but I am disappointed," Maulvi Zia again complained.

"Well, you should talk to him directly about this. I would again say that Malik Naseem is a man of his word and whatever he promised to you, he would honor it. Just give him some time."

Maulvi Zia kept silent and after a while left for the White Mosque.

The next day Maulvi Zia received a message from Malik Naseem asking him to see him at the prime minister's house at seven in the evening. The message rejuvenated the *maulvi*, who until then was constantly speculating whether Malik Naseem would contact him.

At 7 pm sharp, Maulvi Zia reached the prime minister's house. He was taken to the PM office and was asked to wait and he had to wait longer than he expected. On enquiry, he was told that the PM was busy. At last, at 8.45, he was let in the PM's chamber.

"*Assalam-O-Alaikum* Maulvi Zia sahib," Malik Naseem said as the former stepped in. "I'm sorry that I kept you waiting. But there was some urgent business that I had to dispose of.

"I can understand this," Maulvi Zia remarked looking at the bundle of files lying on the prime minister's table.

"Without wasting time, let's come straight to the point. Is there anything I can do for you?" Tomorrow I'll announce my cabinet. I can take couple of persons of your choice?" Malik Naseem made his offer.

"Thanks. But at this point my interest is not in your cabinet. I just want to remind you of your promise," Maulvi Zia said sharply.

"If I'm not wrong, you are alluding to the war on terror?"

“Yes you are right. I’m glad you haven’t forgotten your word. I’ll be happier if you fulfill it,” Maulvi Zia said.

“I’ll definitely, But just give me some time.”

“May I remind you that you had promised to wind up the operation against militants immediately after coming into power? And I was severely disappointed when there was no mention of it in your public address,” Maulvi Zia complained.

“Just as you fathom the depth of the ocean when you are in it, you know the constraints of the government when you enter the corridors of power. At this point, the powers that be — and you know who they are — are opposed to what you want and what I want. I’ll have to create space for that for which I need time.”

“I can give you time. But the people who are behind me are not willing to do so.”

“Come on *maulvi* sahib. The militants hold you in the highest esteem and you have a lot of influence on them. So please make them understand. Tell them to be patient. It’ll be good for all of us. If any person can get the operation stopped, it’s me. And I’ll certainly do so. But right now I’m on a sticky wicket and can’t afford to play a rash stroke. Ask the militants to stop their activities. This will help my government halt the operation against them. I think you understand what I mean.”

Maulvi Zia held his peace.

“Forgive me but I ‘m to chair an important meeting in a while,” Malik Naseem said and rose from the chair. “Zia sahib you’re a far wiser and knowledgeable person than I’m. So it makes little sense if I give you some advice. I only request you not to nourish any doubts as to my intentions. I’m with you and my government is with you. We both want peace and an end to foreign influence. But you’ll appreciate that there is always a lag between desire and its fulfillment,” Malik Naseem sought to reassure Maulvi Zia and opened the door for him. “*Allah hafiz*. I’ll stay in touch with you.”

‘**Justice is the** securest basis of society’. That was the topic assigned to the philosophy class for their weekly group discussion. Dr Junaid was the moderator. He introduced the topic briefly and then invited the class to discussion.

Naila was the first to pick up the thread. “It’s a very easy topic in that we all including Ali can speak on it at length. And I don’t think there can be major disagreement among us on that,” she remarked looking at Sara.

“If you don’t mind, please don’t speak for the entire class. Just speak only for yourself,” Sara objected.

“I know what prompted you to say that,” Naila spoke back looking first at Sara and then at Ali. “However, to save time,” she continued, “I’ll come straight to the discussion. It’s justice for which society, at least a political society, is established. Justice is the bond which keeps society intact. If people don’t get justice, they’ll fight among themselves and the entire social fabric will crumble. So I support the view that justice is the securest basis of society.”

Riaz was the next to speak. “From the Islamic standpoint,” he maintained, “justice lies at the basis of society. In Islam, justice means absolute fairness. In an Islamic society, no one is above the law; all including the ruler are equal before law. The western view that sovereign can do no wrong has no place in Islam. Muslim history is replete with examples where the ruler appeared before the court like an ordinary person and accepted the court ruling. But alas that lofty tradition was discontinued, which more than any other factor led to the downfall of Muslims!”

At this point, Dr Junaid addressing Naila and Riaz said, “I have a question to you two. Is justice natural? Or is it merely a matter of convention. I’m asking this question, because in ancient Greece there was a lot of discussion on that. The Sophists, and you must be well familiar with them, considered justice merely a matter of convention, while Socrates and his pupil Plato, regarded justice as natural. The significance of the nature-convention controversy is that if we regard justice as merely a matter of convention, then the meaning of justice varies from society to society, age to age. But if we think justice to be natural, then justice will have universal meaning.”

“May I answer first,” Naila asked Riaz and receiving a nod from him remarked: “I believe justice is natural. We all have a sense of justice. It is another thing that most of us don’t live up to that sense all the time.”

“I endorsed Nail’s view,” Riaz said. “Justice has universal meaning. Though it may be defined differently in different legal systems, these differences are for the most part formal or linguistic, rather than substantive or material.”

“But how do you define justice,” Ali enquired.

"It's simple," Naila replied. "Justice means giving every one the treatment they deserve. It is justice to hang a murderer and acquit an innocent; reward the virtuous and punish the wicked; promote good and suppress evil."

"You defined justice as giving every one the treatment they deserve. Is not the treatment that one deserves a matter of convention?" Sara asked.

"Pardon me, but I don't really understand what you are driving at. Would you be so nice as to elaborate?" Naila asked.

Sara looked at Dr Junaid, who endorsed Naila's request.

"Ok I'll explain," Sara said shrugging her shoulders. "Deserving or not deserving something is essentially a value judgment and values differ from society to society. Here are some examples. In the western society, prostitution doesn't evoke the same condemnation as in a Muslim society. Taking liquor is not looked upon with disapproval in the West, while among Muslims it's considered *haram*. In European countries, no crime however heinous it may be deserves capital punishment, while this is not the case in many other countries including ours. For conservative Muslims, couples who are guilty of illicit relations deserve death by stoning, while for the vast majority of people such a punishment is barbaric and uncalled for. For Europeans, torture is an unlawful means of extracting confession but Americans don't see any problem with torture if it is the only means of extracting information from accused persons. I can give many such examples. But my essential point is that the concept of justice is rooted in the very ethos of a society and every society has its own ethos. Hence, justice is a matter of convention. There are thus no immutable principles of justice."

"I think Sara has made her point perfectly clear," observed Dr Junaid. Now it's for others to respond."

"There was complete silence in the class as everyone seemed clueless after Sara's remarks, who was smiling triumphantly. But Naila was not prepared to give in. "But at least you accept that justice is the priority of every society," she remarked to Sara.

"I never said that. Nor does what I said imply this," Sara returned. "I was just responding to your argument that justice is not a matter of convention."

"Ok. I stand corrected, "Naila remarked. "May be you'll enlighten us on your views regarding the place of justice in society. But I challenge your proposition that justice is simply a matter of convention by showing that such

a position leads to absurd conclusions."

Naila paused for a moment to catch her breath and then continued, "If justice is regarded as simply a matter of convention, then there cannot be any universal view of justice. Every society is then entitled to have its own view of justice. It is perfectly legitimate for one society to conquer another, for one people to enslave another; for one country to destroy another. Such an approach will make international cooperation and peaceful co-existence of states impossible. Besides, since normally every culture consists of two or more sub cultures, within every society there are different concepts of justice and each concept is equally valid. In that event, it's well-neigh impossible to decide who is right and who is wrong, who is on a high moral ground and who is on a low moral ground, who is justified and who is unjustified. The result is that it will be impossible to resolve conflicts even within one society. The terrorists who have their own concept of justice are as much on a high moral ground as those who are after them."

"Wonderful!" Riaz exclaimed, as Naila finished. "It's game, set and match for you Naila."

"I'm a big admirer of your eloquence Naila," Sara remarked. "But I'm afraid your argument is not convincing; at least it hasn't convinced me. Your argument doesn't explode my position that justice is a matter of convention. As for rivalry among nations and people, the cardinal cause is not disagreement over what is just and what is unjust or what's right and what's wrong but the impulse for power and dominance. Even if all mankind agrees upon a universal definition of justice, peace and order will not ensue, because conflict is built into individuals and societies. It's, if I'm allowed to say, in their DNAs."

"But you agree that justice is the securest basis of society?" Javed asked.

"With all my regard for your sensibilities, I doubt this," Sara replied. "It's not justice alone that makes society secure. We need to look for other factors as well. A society characterized by absolute justice may come to ruin if it does not have the capacity to respond to the challenges it faces, which may be internal as well as external. Justice doesn't ensure progress in society. Nor does it ensure its bare survival. A completely just society may be destroyed by an epidemic for which it has no cure."

"I think it's enough for now," Dr Junaid said. "We'll try to arrange another discussion on this topic. Thank you very much for this animated debate."

Chapter 17

From his conversation with Malik Naseem, Maulvi Zia had realized that the new prime minister wasn't inclined to halt the operation against the militants, at least not immediately. So he decided to speak to his confidant Dr Junaid and chart the future course of action in consultation with him.

When they met, Maulvi Zia gave a detailed account of his meeting with Malik Naseem and how he had ignored his calls and how he had forgotten to invite him to his reception.

"Either Malik Naseem himself doesn't want peace with the militants or the establishment doesn't approve of such a step. In either case, we shouldn't count much on the new government," Dr Junaid opined.

"This means for us the change in the government has proved a futile exercise," Maulvi Zia lamented. "We wasted our time, energy and money on a wrong cause."

"It appears so," Dr Junaid agreed. "But ours is not a totally lost cause. With the previous government, we had no hopes; with Malik Naseem we have at least some hope."

Aren't we hoping against the hope?"

"Not really," Dr Junaid replied. "We'll do what we need to do. If the government of Malik Naseem falls in with us, it's well and good; if it doesn't, it shouldn't matter much. What I gather is that the new government is taking us for granted and when someone takes you for granted, he doesn't take you seriously. What we should do is to make them take us seriously," Dr Junaid observed.

"And someone takes us seriously when they think we can benefit or harm them. So the moment the government feels threatened by us, they'll take us seriously. I think I'll talk to the *mujahideen* for couple of explosions," Maulvi Zia said. "Simultaneously I'll ask the White Mosque students to shore up their campaign against evil."

"Campaign against evil! What the hell is that?" Dr Junaid asked.

On this, Maulvi Zia briefed him about the White Mosque students' campaign, which evoked laughter from Dr Junaid. It's interesting," he remarked.

"Actually, I lost interest in the campaign because of the non-confidence

motion against the previous govt. But now I feel we can use it to our advantage," Maulvi Zia said. "Actually, I don't want Malik Naseem's government to fall apart. But I don't want it to have a smooth sailing either. Eventually, he must turn to us for support and he will," Maulvi Zia said with a voice choked with emotions.

"Agreed," Dr Junaid nodded. "Oh this reminds me of the girl who interviewed you twice on education reforms. Any news of her?"

"I'm afraid not. Probably she has left for London but she would return in a few months."
"You took fancy to her. Didn't you?" Dr Junaid enquired.

"Well she is young, hot and beautiful. I'm sure anyone who saw her would've a crush on her. I feel sorry for you that you were not here each time she came."

"Zia sahib, I guess you are destined to meet and enjoy beautiful women, while I'm fated only to hear the accounts of your exploits," Dr Junaid remarked in a light vain. "I think I should leave."

"Dinner will be served in few minutes. Let's go to the dining room."

Ali was beginning to take interest in Sara. He thought she was the girl he had always aspired for: she had style, beauty and the brains. To add to that, she was the heir to a business empire, though Ali didn't have much interest in money. The girls that Ali had hitherto come across were either beautiful or intelligent. But none was endowed with both attributes. Farzana was beautiful but she wasn't intelligent and that was probably the reason that Ali was able to resist her charms.

However, Ali was by nature shy and indecisive. That is why he was finding it difficult to express his feelings to Sara. He had gone through similar problem in case of Farzana. But there was a clear difference between the two cases. In case of Farzana, he found it difficult to admit to himself that he loved her; while in case of Sara, he had little problem in acknowledging that he was in love with her. There was another difference between the two cases. Whereas Farzana had conveyed her love to Ali one way or the other; he really didn't know how Sara felt for him or whether she had any tender feelings for him at all. Though Ali was the only male in the entire college with whom Sara was on friendly terms, it was difficult for him to conjecture whether it was mere friendship or something more.

Being essentially a lonely person, Ali had no friends. In the college, Javed was the only person he occasionally held tête-à-tête. Ali was not used to sharing his feelings with others — even to himself. But now he felt a strong desire to share his feelings for Sara with someone.

"Who can it be?" he pondered. "Such feelings can be shared only with a friend. But regrettably I have no friend except perhaps Sara. Should I go and open my heart to her? But how would she react? I think the best course for me will be to ascertain how Sara feels for me, because if she has no place for me in her heart then there's no point in opening my heart to her. But how to ascertain this? Like me Sara is a solitary figure and has no friends. Should I send her an e-mail or text her? But that looks like an immature way of conveying my feelings to a girl as mature as Sara. I should pick up the courage and speak to her. Yes that's more like a man. What she would do at the most? Snub me and will never speak to me again. This is not a big deal. But it can be worse. She may insult me before the entire class. And if she did so, that would well be my last day in college for I'll not be able to face my classmates again."

While Ali was arguing with himself, he received a text message from Sara requesting him to meet her the next day. Their college had just closed for summer vacation and since then he hadn't seen or heard from her. So in response to Sara's message, he replied her that he would meet her at time and place of her convenience.

"At 4 in the evening at my place, "Sara texted.

"Ok I'll go and see her and then decide on the spot whether I should candidly state my feelings to her," Ali decided.

Ali had never been to Sara's home before. In fact, he had met her only couple of times outside the college including once in his father's office. He was thinking all the time why Sara had invited her. "Maybe she wants me to meet her father. But why she wants so? Does she also think about me the way I think about her? Well this seems to be quite plausible an explanation. But am I not being too optimistic? Maybe there's nothing special about that. Well, it'll soon be clear to me," Ali thought.

Sara lived in a posh area of the city at a fair distance from Ali's residence. So he hired a cab and after fifteen minutes' drive reached the locality. In another a few minutes, he was standing before Sara's magnificent house. "So it's here that Sara lives," Ali was impressed.

"My name is Ali and I'm here to meet Ms Sara Aqeel," Ali told the guard

standing outside Sara's bungalow.

"Yes sir, you can go in," the guard answered respectfully and opened the gate for him.

Ali walked past the gate and had hardly covered few paces when he was received by an attendant, who took him to a small but elegantly furnished study.

"Sir please wait. I'll inform madam Sara about you," the attendant told him.

Ali seated himself on a leather sofa and cast a glance at the study. There were book shelves across the walls. Each shelf carried the title of the subject on which it contained books like philosophy, literature, psychology and reference works. On one side was a computer table carrying Sony's notebook.

"So it's Sara's study," Ali guessed. "When will I have such a nice study?" he thought. "But this requires a lot of money, which I may never have."

Ali's thoughts were interrupted by the sweet voice of Sara. "So you have arrived. Thanks for coming."

He rose as he saw Sara, who was casually dressed in black trousers and a T-shirt and was looking younger and paler than she usually appeared. Ali wanted to acknowledge her thanks but could not.

"I'm sorry I called you here in this manner. Actually I'm not feeling well — just slight fever," Sara explained.

"It's all right," Ali said with a smile. He wanted to add that he himself was desperate to see her but could not.

"Oh forgive me. What would you like to have?" Sara asked.

"I think tea will do," Ali replied and Sara ordered tea on the intercom.

"Have you taken some medicine?" Ali asked.

Sara replied in the affirmative.

Ali was desperate to know why Sara had called her but was reluctant to ask.

"Nice study," Ali remarked for want of saying something else.

“Yes thanks,” Sara nodded. “Reading, along with web surfing is my favorite pastime. I have a very good collection of books --- original works of Plato and Marx, Shakespeare and Shaw. But I warn you, I don’t believe in lending books. But of course you are an exception. If you need any book, you can borrow it from me.”

“Thanks for this gracious offer and I’ll certainly draw upon your generosity,” Ali said. “How is your father?”

“He’s fine. But he is off to Karachi for a business meeting, otherwise I would have introduced you to him. Some other time maybe,” Sara replied. “You must be interested in knowing why I called you here. The thing is…” At that moment, there was a slight knock at the door and a servant entered with tea and cookies.

“You can go,” Sara said as he put the tea on the table. “And please I’m not to be disturbed.”

The servant nodded respectfully and left.

“There are couple of things I wanted to discuss with you, “Sara said as she made tea for both.”

Ali listened attentively and thanked Sara as she handed him his cup of tea.

“First any news about the links between my father and Maulvi Zia,” Sara enquired.

“I’m afraid not,” Ali replied rather apologetically. “If there was any, father would have told me.”

“Ok. “But just ask uncle Naqvi once more.”

“I’ll,” Ali assured.

“Now there’s something more important. I have been proposed by a business friend of Papa. Of course he has always left it to me to decide about my future. But I want your advice,” Sara disclosed.

“My advice!” Ali exclaimed. “How can I possibly advise you? I mean who I’m to advise you in such an important decision of your life?”

“Ali you are very special to me. Don’t you think so?” Sara remarked and took Ali’s hand.

“Really,” Ali spoke in disbelief. “Am I so important for you?”

“Yes you are. If you have any doubt, just look into my eyes, as eyes are the index of the heart”

Ali looked into Sara’s deep eyes and what he saw there convinced him that he had a special place in her heart. “I love you Sara,” he remarked.

“I love you too,” Sara reciprocated.

The next moment they were in each other’s arms. Ali could feel the beat of Sara’s heart and the soft pressure of her big breasts. He did not believe that things would take that turn.

“What are you thinking about?” Sara asked and Ali was back to the real time and found himself sitting before Sara.

“So it was my fancy,” he said to himself.

“Ali are you ok?” Sara asked.

“Yes I’m,” he replied abstractly.

“Ok. I wanted to discuss with you the topic for my research paper,” Sara told him. “I have a few topics in my find. Have you decided yours?”

“No, I’m afraid I haven’t.” Ali was still between the two worlds.

“Then you should think about one. We need to make some headway during summer vacation.”

“Yes I’ll do,” Ali replied abstractly.

You must share your thoughts with me. But first see what I have in mind. There are four topics. One is ‘critique of dialectical materialism’, the second is ‘the post modern state,’ the third is ‘the problem of freewill and determinism,’ and the fourth is Nietzsche’s view of trans-valuation of values’. What do you suggest?“ Sara asked.

“All the four topics are interesting. Have you any preference among them?”

“Not really. In fact, if I had preference for any of them, it would have been an easier decision. As you know, studies are not for me a means of getting a job

but an instrument of understanding. So whatever research topic I choose, I'll go to the bottom even if I don't get a good grade for that," Sara remarked rather proudly.

Ali felt embarrassed at Sara's reference to studies and job. "Yes you are right, studies become delightful when they are done for their own sake. But everyone is not fortunate like you. Most of us have to study for a job."

"I'm sorry I didn't mean it. But you must advise me."

"Ok. I'm myself interested in the problem of freedom and determinism, though I don't know whether I'll choose this topic. Dialectical materialism is one topic on which much has already been written. I think you should go for Nietzsche's view of transvaluation of values. Little work has been done in our country on that," Ali opined.

"Here you are. I think I'll go for Nietzsche. Thanks for the advice. Well this reminds me of Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence. I read it last night and found it quite interesting. You must be familiar with that?"

"I'm just familiar with that," Ali replied modestly. "I'm afraid I haven't been through Nietzsche's original works."

"Don't you feel at times that what you experience has happened to you before so much so that you can predict what's going to happen and it turns out to be true — what we call it *déjà vu*?" Sara asked.
"Yes, I suppose everyone of us has had such experience on several occasions. But I don't know we can infer from this that we live the same life again and again," Ali replied.

"I agree with you. *Déjà vu* can be explained on some other ground as well. For instance, that we unconsciously fear or wish something to happen and it does happen. But I don't know how can we predict an event unless we have been through that before," Sara said.

"Actually, there are significant ethical implications of eternal recurrence. The most important being that if we are condemned to live the same life endlessly, there is no possibility of moral progress either individually or collectively," Ali opined.

"Here I'm afraid I disagree with you. Moral progress can be achieved in the course of one life."

"That may be so," Ali replied in a tone that showed he wasn't convinced.

“Anyway, eternal recurrence is an interesting theory and I’ll definitely devote some time to that.”

“I have Nietzsche’s original works, which you can borrow whenever you want,” Sara offered.

“Thanks. I’ll definitely some time,” Ali replied. Then looking at his watch said, “I’ll take your leave now.”

“Ok. When will we meet again?”

“Our department and library will open every Thursday from 9 in the morning to 2 in the afternoon during the vacation. I think we can meet on coming Thursday.”

“That’s nice,” Sara assented. “I’ll give you a call and we’ll fix the time. “Should I get you dropped?” Sara offered Ali as they came out of the study towards the main entrance.

“No thanks,” Ali replied. “I’ll take a cab.”

Chapter 18

It was a seminary in North Waziristan where some twenty militant leaders had gathered for consultations. Rustam Shah, the head of the Tehrik-e-Taliban, was presiding. Looking at the audience he said, "It's one month since the new government was installed. We were promised by a person no less than Malik Naseem himself that as soon as they formed the government, the military operation against us would be stopped and we would be allowed to maintain the territory that we held. That's why we supported him. However, it is a matter of grave disappointment that they haven't fulfilled their promise and the operation against us continues and so do the drone attacks."

Rustam Shah paused for a moment and then resumed: "I have also talked to Maulvi Zia sahib and he is also of the view that Malik Naseem and his government are not going to honor their commitment. In that event, we are also not bound to keep our word. So we need to go back to our earlier strategy of killing as many people as possible including some hard targets so that the government is forced to negotiate with us on our terms."

The other militants were listening keenly to him and whenever he paused they shouted *Allah-o-Akbar* expressing their resolve to live and die for their cause.

"You want to say something," Rustam Shah asked his deputy Saad Khan, who was known for his ferocity.

"Yes with the permission of the *ameer* I'd submit that we should give a befitting message to the new government, otherwise they would think that we are coward. There should be explosions in next few days in major cities of the country," Saad Khan said.

"You are right Saad Khan," Rustam Shah assented. "Since you are in charge of bomb blasts, make arrangements accordingly."

"Shouldn't we target the traitor Malik Naseem," another militant asked?

"No. This is not the right time," Rustam Shah stated categorically. "First there is huge security around him, which it would be difficult for us to break in. If we target him, he'll be saved and I don't want him to be turned into to a hero. Second, we should give him a chance for he is the best among the worst. By the grace of Allah we'll make him negotiate with us."

"I believe you have some new recruits. How is their training going," Rustam Shah asked Saad Khan.
"It's going at full swing," Saad Khan replied. Perhaps the *ameer* would like to

address them."

"Yes after the prayers I'll speak to these fortunate boys whom Allah Almighty has chosen for this noble cause."

After the sunset prayers, Rustam Shah along with Saad Khan and some other militants went to that part of the seminary where a batch of ten boys was being trained. They were aged between twelve and sixteen. Seeing the militant leaders they stood, more in awe than in respect.

"*Assalam-o-Alaikum*," Rustam Shah said in an imperious voice. "Among the millions of people in this country you are the most fortunate ones to be chosen for the completion of our noble mission. We are fighting for the glory of our great religion and that's why the forces of *kufr* have united against us. It is regrettable that some of the misguided souls in our own ranks are serving them. Today we are in minority but by the grace of Allah Almighty soon we'll purge this country of the forces of evil and establish a truly Islamic state here."

Rustam Shah took a pause and looked at his young audience, who, their faces unmistakably told him, were willing to die at his behest. Resuming his address he said, "Allah orders us to sacrifice all that we have in His way. And what is more precious to a man than his life — which is the great gift of Allah. But our life is also a trust from Allah and we are answerable to Him for all our deeds. The best way we can repay that trust is to live and die for Allah — to perpetually wage jihad against infidels. If we die in the course of jihad, we will be called martyrs and the most glorious death is that of the martyr. The reward for martyrdom is an everlasting life in the paradise. The moment you die for Allah, you'll enter the paradise, where young beautiful women will be waiting for you. In the paradise, all your desires will be fulfilled. Not only that, when you die a martyr's death, your parents will also be rewarded for that. That is why I call you the most blessed souls on this earth. Promise me that you'll live and die for Islam and nothing will stop you from fulfilling your mission."

"We promise you," the recruits said with one voice.

"May Allah keep you steadfast," Rustam Shah said and then went away.

While on his way back home, Ali kept thinking about Sara. She really had everything a man would aspire for in his prospective life partner. But Ali was also painfully aware of the disparity in their positions. "Why would Sara consent to marry me?" he asked himself. "She can easily find a far better

match. If a girl like Farzana who has the same background as I wants to marry me, it is understandable. But that a girl like Sara, who represents the ideal of a complete woman, can find in me a match for her is hard to comprehend."

But something at the back of his mind convinced Ali that Sara was in some way attracted to him. What that was he didn't know. After all, why she would call him home, sit with him in her study and discuss with him her future plans. "I'm not rich. Nor I'm a very brilliant student. Nor am I a very good-looking person. Nor do I have a very bright future ahead of me. In fact, I'm an average man in every respect — so average that I fall below the expectations of as average a person as Babu Javed. There are then two possible explanations. Either I'm grossly mistaken in what Sara thinks about me or I'm grossly mistaken about myself. Maybe there is something in me which is hidden from myself but clearly visible to Sara," he explained to himself.

Ali was so much engrossed in arguing with himself that he didn't know when he reached home. "Sir we are in street No.4. Where should I go now?" the taxi driver asked him. "Please stop here," Ali replied and got out of the taxi.

As Ali entered his apartment, he heard someone talking loudly. As he went in, he saw Babu Javed arguing with his father. Seeing Ali, he said to Mr Naqvi, "He is here, ask him."

What's the matter father?" Ali asked in surprise as he had never seen anyone talk to his father like that. Mrs Naqvi was also present.

"My son," said Mr Naqvi, "Farzana has refused to marry Rashid and Javed suspects you of being behind her decision."

"I don't suspect. I'm certain that he has prevailed upon Farzana to have her engagement dissolved," Babu Javed broke in pointing a finger at Ali.

"Javed please let him explain," Mr Naqvi emphatically said.

"Father I don't know what's this all about. I have nothing to do with Farzana or the making or breaking of her engagement," Ali explained.

"He is lying," Babu Javed shouted. "He is very much involved in the affair. Ask him did he not meet Farzana and Rashid?"

"Ali is it correct?" Mr Naqvi asked.

"I did meet Farzana only once after her engagement and that was here in mother's presence. I only congratulated her on her engagement and wished

her for her future life."

"Yes they met in my presence," Mrs Naqvi confirmed.

"And what about Rashid? Did you meet him too?" Mr Naqvi enquired.

Ali remained silent for few moments and then said, "I did meet Rashid but only once and that too on his request."

"Here you are Hassan Naqvi," Babu Javed taunted.

"Please let him complete Javed, "Mr Naqvi implored his guest and then turning to Ali said, "Would you like to tell us what went between you too?"

"I'm sorry I can't, because we had promised not to tell a third person about our meeting," Ali stated.

"This is a nice pretext. Is it not?" remarked Babu Javed.

"If he is under an obligation not to speak, then I cannot force him," Mr Naqvi plainly told Babu Javed.

"Nor would I." Mrs Naqvi put her weight behind her husband.

"Ok, if Ali doesn't speak then I will because I'm under no such obligation. Even if I were, I would speak to clear the matter up. Your illustrious son, Hassan, told Rashid that Farzana loved her and he loved her and that the engagement was done against Farzana's will and that Rashid should not stand between them," Babu Javed alleged.

"This is grossly incorrect," Ali protested. "I never said such things to Rashid. Why would I say such things to him?"

"Because you aren't reconciled to his engagement with Farzana. And because you want to marry her yourself," Babu Javed made another allegation.

"This is sheer nonsense. I never wanted to marry Farzana and would never want to," Ali cried.

"It is all right. You can go Ali," Mrs Naqvi intervened and then addressing Babu Javed said, "I think you have got the answer. My son has nothing to do with your daughter. You marry her wherever and whoever you want to. I have the highest opinion of Farzana. But I feel sorry for her as well as for you that you don't understand her."

“I’ll see you all,” Babu Javed sounded a warning and with heavy steps left.

“I don’t understand this man. By making such baseless allegations, he’s only insulting his own daughter,” an exasperated Mrs Naqvi remarked. “But please don’t see Rashid again,” she advised Ali.

“I don’t know what transpired between you and Rashid and I wouldn’t press you to disclose that. I know and your mother knows that you don’t want to marry Farzana so it is inconceivable that you tried to dissuade Rashid from marrying her. This means that probably Rashid has misled Javed,” Mr Naqvi said.

“But why would Rashid do that? Maybe he is not happy over his engagement with Farzana and is saying such things only to avoid marrying her,” Mrs Naqvi conjectured.

“Mother if you allow me, I’ll talk to Rashid and ask him why he lied to uncle Javed,” Ali asked.

“No. If he lied once; he can lie another time. I think you should keep your hands off both Farzana and Rashid,” Mr Naqvi said.

“Ok,” Ali assented and went to his room.

Chapter 19

Ali had hardly believed that Rashid, whom he had reckoned to be quite a reasonable person, would not only break his word about their meeting, which took place on his request, but also lie patently. Ali recalled that he had plainly told him that he wasn't interested in marrying Farzana and that Rashid could be a good match for her.

"But why he has told uncle Javed that I want to marry Farzana?" What benefit can he drive from this?" Ali asked himself. "Only Rashid can answer this. But father and mother have forbidden me to meet him and I should abide by their decision. Perhaps Farzana can throw some light on this. It is also possible that she still insists on marrying me and her father suspects she does so at my behest. I think I should try and see Farzana."

While Ali was immersed in his thoughts, his cell phone rang up. "Ali it's me, Farzana. I want to meet you; it's very urgent."

"What's it Farzana? We already just have had enough of your father," Ali could not control his anger.

"I can guess what father said to you. But I want to meet you and explain."

This is what Ali also wanted but in spite of that he refused to see Farzana and told her never to call him again. "Please spare us. And in case you really have some explanation or apology to make, do so before my mother," Having said so, he rang off.

"Why I did this? I should have agreed to see Farzana. Maybe she had some important thing to share with me. It would have enabled me to know what transpired between Babu Javed and Rashid. But probably I have done the right thing. Why should I get myself entangled into their affairs when I have nothing to do with Farzana? I have far more important things to think about and attend to," Ali decided.

"And the most important thing right now is that I should also decide about my research topic. Like Sara, I also need to short list the topics and then choose one of them. Oh Sara what a girl she is — complete in each and every respect! Am I not fortunate that she trusts in and counts on me? But is it mere trust or something else? The only person who can answer this question is Sara herself. And she'll answer this question only when someone asks it. But God knows how she'll react when I put this question to her. She may get annoyed and refuse to see me again. I guess I shouldn't get impatient and wait to let her speak about that herself. Yes wait and see will be the right strategy for me,"

Ali made another decision.

Ali turned on his laptop and began exploring possible research topics. After pondering for half an hour, he came up with four topics. I guess I'll share these topics with Sara when we meet on coming Thursday. What day is today? It's Monday. It means another three days are left when I'll get a chance to see her. Until then I can only think about her. Should I give her a call? I had better not. She may suspect I'm trying to intrude upon her privacy and may think low of me. So far she has a very good impression of me and I should avoid doing anything which may erase this impression."

While Ali was trying to figure out his relations with Sara, his parents were discussing Farzana in another room. "What do you think has gone wrong?" Mr Naqvi solicited his wife's opinion.

"I think the fault lies with Javed *Bhai*. He has always been callous to Farzana's feelings and tried to impose his will on her. You know and I know and he also knows that Farzana loves Ali but he forced her engagement with Rashid, whom she didn't know at all. But you know love never dies and of late Farzana may have again insisted on marrying Ali," Mrs Naqvi expressed her opinion.

"You are right dear," agreed Mr Naqvi. "But what I don't understand is why did Ali meet Rashid? You know he didn't deny that he met Rashid. What he denies is that he told Rashid that he and Farzana love each other and therefore he shouldn't stand between them."

"And we know that he's speaking the truth, because he doesn't want to marry Farzana," Mrs Naqvi observed prompting a nod from her husband.

"We can ask Ali. But I think we had better not quiz, him at least not for the time being. I may ask him tomorrow," Mrs Naqvi said. "But please tell Javed *Bhai* not to barge into our house again. If he cannot set his house in order, it doesn't mean he should pollute the atmosphere of ours."

"I'll do so dear," Mr Naqvi nodded.

Maulvi Zia had decided to go all out against the Malik Naseem govt. "The bastard needs to be taught a befitting lesson," he told Dr Junaid. Accordingly, he directed his White Mosque brigand to get music and video shops closed in their locality as well as attack the beauty-cum-fitness centre run by Mrs Khan. The brigand was already desperate to parade their love for religion and virtue and hatred for evil and obscenity.

Therefore as soon as they received the directive, the students including both boys and girls and carrying clubs went to the market, smashed the glass doors and shelves of video and music shops and set posters, CDs and DVDs on fire. They warned the protesting shopkeepers that if they tried to resume their evil businesses, they would be assaulted. "If you want to lodge a complaint with the police and report the matter to the local parliamentarian, go ahead. But these corrupt and debauch people will not be able to rescue you," their message was loud and clear.

The matter was instantly reported to the police, who arrived at the scene. "We had told you earlier about the threats we received from White Mosque students and you promised to help us. But where's your help?" one of the shopkeepers angrily said to a police official.

"We did receive your complaints but we didn't know that they mean it. But are you sure the rioters were from the White Mosque?" the head of the police party inspector Mujahid asked.

"Sir we are as sure as that they you are before us," another shopkeeper replied. "We recognize them except the women who were clad in *burqa* so we could not see their faces. But we are certain that they too were from the White Mosque."

"If that's the case, then I assure you that the culprits will be apprehended and taught a lesson. But would you be appearing in the court against them?" inspector Mujahid put another question.

"Why not sir. These people have destroyed our livelihood," the shopkeepers spoke with one voice.

Inspector Mujahid along with his police contingent went to the White Mosque. Since the police couldn't enter the mosque, they went to the office-cum-residence of Maulana Majeed, which was adjacent to the mosque. The *maulana* was present there and consented to meet the police.

Maulana Majeed knew well why the police had come to see him but feigned ignorance. "Why brings you here?" the *maulana* asked inspector Mujahid.

"Maulana sahib you must be aware that some of your students have attacked video and music shops in the locality, beaten up shopkeepers, burnt CDs and DVDs and got the shops forcibly closed. We request you to please hand them over to the police," inspector Mujahid politely narrated the purpose of his visit.

“I believe our students have done a commendable job. These shops were a den of obscenity and vulgarity and some time back we had requested the shopkeepers to wind up their businesses but they ignored our request. Obviously, we could not have allowed that obscenity and vulgarity to go on forever, as it was exercising a baneful effect on the residents, particularly the young generation. In fact, we had received several complaints from the residents about these shops,” Maulana Majeed explained.

“Maulana I do share your concern. But if someone had any complaint against these shops, the same should have been lodged with the police and we definitely had acted to redress the grievance,” inspector Mujahid said.

“If the local administration was so mindful of its duty, there would be no need for us to act. But I feel sorry to state you people were oblivious of your responsibility and allowed these people to run their filthy businesses,” the *maulana* returned.

“I agree that the police may not have acted promptly. But it doesn’t mean that your students or anyone else should take the law into their hands.”

“I really don’t understand what you are talking inspector. But you must understand that we are living in an Islamic state, where it’s the foremost duty of every citizen — young or old, male or female — to wage *jihad* against evil in whatever form it exists. Our students did what every other Muslim should do and I’m proud of them,” the *maulana* said in a crisp tone.

“Maulana I’m not a religious scholar so I can’t argue with you about what is jihad and what is not jihad. What’s good and what’s evil. I can only say that your students have broken the law on more than one count; the aggrieved party has lodged a complaint against them, so we have to interrogate them. Please cooperate with us” inspector Mujahid said in a sharp tone.

“My answer is the same,” Maulana Majeed reiterated. “We can’t deliver them to you.”

“Sir please don’t force us to get tough on you,” inspector Mujahid was as polite as he could be.

“Get tough on us? You people can get as much tough on us as you want. We aren’t afraid of you and your masters. But forget our students.”

“Then I’m afraid, the police will enter the premises to nab the accused students,” the inspector sounded a warning.

“The police will enter the White Mosque premises! Over our dead bodies. You should know what the place of the mosque and *madaris* in Islam is. Even a conquering army cannot enter there. What to say of the police of an Islamic state.”

Inspector Mujahid had realized that the *maulana* was in no mood to hand over the students to him. Nor would it be possible for his men to enter the White Mosque premises without seeking the approval of their high-ups. So he decided they should leave for now.

“Ok *maulana* we are going but we’ll come back soon and this time we’ll not go back until we lay our hands on your students.”

“We’ll see,” the *maulana* replied contemptuously. “May Allah show you the right path!”

Ali’s long hours of wait ended and Thursday came. Having taken his breakfast, he made his way to the campus. As he entered the department’s library, he saw Naila, Riaz and Javed talking with each other but there was no sign of Sara.

“Look who has come!” Riaz remarked as he saw Ali.

Ali greeted his classmates. “You are probably looking for Sara,” Riaz remarked.

“Don’t worry, she’ll also be here but only after she has kept him waiting for quite some time,” Naila added pointing towards Ali.

“I’m not waiting for anyone,” Ali said feeling a bit embarrassed at the fact that his classmates had rightly guessed.

“Oh really,” Riaz said sarcastically. “I can bet you wouldn’t have come had you not hoped to see Sara here.”

“Riaz why are you trying to make much of that,” Javed interposed. “After all we are all here but it doesn’t mean that we have come to meet someone in particular.”

“Javed you are right. Ali can meet Sara anywhere he wants. He doesn’t need this place for a date. Am I right Ali?” Naila was sarcastic.

“I don’t know what you two are driving at,” Ali addressed Naila and Riaz. “If you don’t want me here, I can leave.”

“Come on mate. We were just joking,” Riaz said. “How are your studies?”

“Fine,” Ali replied. “I was just thinking about possible topics for the thesis. Have you decided yours?”

“Not yet,” they all three spoke spontaneously.

“I think we have enough time to decide about that,” Javed said.

“But I believe Sara must have decided hers. She always wants to take the lead,” Naila remarked.

“But if Sara has finalized her research topic, Ali must know that. Yes Ali have you got anything to enlighten us? Has Sara told you about her research topic?” Riaz asked.

Ali knew that if he answered in the affirmative, Naila and Riaz would make much of that and make all sorts of silly statements about him and Sara. Therefore, he preferred to remain silent.”

Javed realized that Ali didn’t like that question. So he came to Ali’s rescue and said, ”Why are we talking about someone who is not present? Riaz you had better put that question to Sara when she is here. Can’t we talk about something else? For instance, how do you see the change in the government?”

“We have had enough of politics. TV channels are debating this question all the time. However, since you have asked, my answer simply is that change in the government will change nothing,” Naila gave her opinion.

“We have a new government every two or three years. But there is no real change; the only change is that of faces. It’s often the case of new bottles and the old wine and even sometimes of old bottles and old wine,” Riaz endorsed Naila.

“In fact, things have gone from bad to worse. Every government is worse than its predecessor. It’s more corrupt, more inefficient, more uncertain of its objectives, more confused in its policies. The result is regression in every field. Unemployment has increased; poverty has risen, national morale has slipped,” Naila observed.

“But who is to blame for this situation?” Javed asked.

“Of course the politicians,” Naila replied. “I wouldn’t say that others are innocent. But you know leaders should lead from the front. They should set a good example for others to follow. As the poet Chaucer said, if gold rusts what shall the iron do? But our politicians are good for nothing rascals.”

Don’t you think we are passing through an evolutionary stage and things will get better by and by provided the current democratic process goes on?” Javed put another question.

“I don’t buy this argument,” Riaz said with a shake of the head. “Democracy is no solution to our problems. In our country, democracy means only elections and elections repeatedly bring the members of the same handful of families to power. In one election, it’s the father, in another the son and in yet another the brother or the sister. That’s why I earlier said that ours is a case of old bottles and the old wine. Hence, whatever democracy we have is elitist democracy and an elitist democracy can never serve the people.

“You will bear me out that whenever the military throws out a civilian government, it meets virtually no opposition or resistance from the people for the simple reason that the so-called democratic government never related itself to the people. So my dear friend let’s have no illusions, no wishful thinking, no false hopes. Until there is a basic change in the system, there will never be a change for the better even if the so-called democratic process continues for another hundred or even thousand years. Similar causes produce similar effects. Our problem is that we want to have different effects but are not prepared to change the causes. It’s as simple as that.”

“Do you agree with Riaz and Naila?” Javed asked Ali. Though Ali was sitting there, he wasn’t really listening to the discussion. So he was surprised at Javed’s question. This prompted Naila to remark, “let’s not disturb Ali; he is preoccupied with something else.”
Before Ali could answer Naila, the library’s entrance door opened and appeared the tall, impressive figure of Sara. “Think of the devil,” Naila murmured.

Seeing Sara, Ali Javed and Riaz rose to welcome her. But Naila kept seated. “It’s good to see you all,” Sara said with her signature smile.

Naila who until then was the centre of attraction was dwarfed by Sara’s arrival. Being eternally jealous of Sara, she never liked her company. However, she also tried to feign a smile but could not.

“You seemed to be in some sort of discussion,” Sara asked?

“What else can we do,” Javed remarked so spontaneously that it prompted every one to break into laughter. “Actually, we were discussing the change in the government,” Riaz added. “But if you are not interested, we can change the topic.”

Naila was surprised at how Riaz had changed his loyalty from her to Sara, but she kept silent.

“I don’t mind discussing politics,” Sara replied nonchalantly.

“I think we have had enough discussion. We had better talk about something else. But right now I’m dying for a cup of tea. I’m going to cafeteria and you are welcome to join me,” Naila said and stood.

“I never say no to a cup of tea,” Javed remarked and followed Naila to cafeteria.

“You don’t want to have tea?” Sara asked Riaz.

“No, I avoid taking tea during summer.”

“Ok. But I’ll have and I’m sure Ali you’ll accompany me,” Sara said and along with Ali went to the cafeteria leaving Riaz high and dry.

Sara and Ali went to a separate table in the cafeteria. Naila and Javed were at another table at quite a distance from them so that one could not hear what the other was talking.
“Sara I wanted to share with you the topics that I have short-listed for the thesis,” Ali told Sara.

“Oh really! What are those?”

“Like you, I have identified four topics. The first is ‘critique of capitalism’. The second is ‘Oswald Spangler’s philosophy of history’. The third is ‘political economy of thinking’. And the fourth is ‘radical Islam — a philosophy or strategy’,” Ali explained.

“I haven’t read Spangler; so frankly I’m in no position to make a statement whether his philosophy of history will be a good topic for you to research. ‘Critique of capitalism,’ well a lot has been written on that and I’ll therefore not advise you to select this topic unless of course you can analyze capitalism from an entirely new perspective. The other two topics seem quite interesting and I don’t know whether in our country any quality work has been done on

either. Would you be kind enough to expatiate?" Sara asked.

"Yes why not. First, 'the political economy of thinking.' As you know, there are two modes of thinking — inductive and deductive. Inductive thinking promotes science and skepticism, individualism and liberalism. Deductive thinking, on the other hand, makes for religion and faith, collectivism and conservatism. I want to study how a society's mode of thinking is related to its political, economic and religious institutions both as a cause and an effect. Our own society of course will be the case study." Ali paused for a moment and then looked at Sara for her comments.

"Intriguing! I must say. I'm familiar with induction and deduction but only as modes of thinking. I never looked at their political and economic aspects. Nor am I familiar with any previous work on that. So yours, in case you decide, will be a path breaking study," Sara remarked.
"Thanks. And now the other topic. Today a common allegation against Islam is that it's a militant religion and that it preaches violence and extremism. Our own society is facing the menace of religious extremism in a way and on a scale probably no other society has faced before. I intend to study the roots of the phenomenon to find out whether extremism is embedded in Islam or it is merely a convenient strategy adopted by some misguided souls," Ali explained.

"My only concern," Sara pointed out, "is whether you will be able to do justice to the topic. I mean can you impartially enquire into the connection between Islam and extremism? Moreover, and this is equally important, in case you conclude that extremism is embedded in Islam and that it's a philosophy and not merely a strategy, would the university accept your thesis? It is one thing to allow freedom of expression in the classroom and it's another to accept a paper, which runs counter to our cherished beliefs. You get what I mean, I suppose."

"Yes I get it. Should not I discuss the topic with Dr Junaid as well?"

"Well, that's a good idea. You may discuss both the topics with him," Sara advised. "I think we should return to the library. I need to borrow some books."

From the university, Sara dropped Ali home. On Ali's insistence, she went to his apartment. "Mother she is Sara, my classmate," Ali introduced her to Mrs Naqvi.

"Nice to see you," Mrs Naqvi said.

“Pleasure is mine,” Sara replied.

Sara remained there for quarter of an hour and then took leave of her hosts. “You must come again,” Mrs Naqvi requested her.

“I’ll definitely,” Sara promised.

Mrs Naqvi was impressed with Sara. She also saw in her son’s eyes his love for her. So that’s Sara. She is really impressive.”

“She is also very rich — heir to a business empire — but wealth has not spoiled her. Nor has it made her conceited. She is very simple and down to earth,” Ali praised Sara.

“Do you like her?” Mrs Naqvi asked.

The question made Ali blush. “Well I don’t know, but she is very nice.”

“I think I got the answer. I’m going to have a nap,” Mrs Naqvi said and went to her room.

The entrance bell rang and as Ali opened the door Farzana entered. Ali was not expecting her and having had a nice time with Sara earlier in the day, he had no appetite to see any other girl, least of all Farzana.

“You!” Ali yelled with a straight face.

Farzana realized that she was an unwelcome guest but nevertheless she put up a brave face. “I have come to see aunt Fatima,” she said and went inside.

“I’m afraid she is having a nap. You may come again if it is necessary,” Ali said in the same cold tone.

“I know you are annoyed with me. I feel sorry for how my father behaved with you and uncle and the aunt and have come to apologize for the same,” Farzana explained with her eyes cast down.”

“Ok whatever you have got to say, say it before mother but some other time,” Ali said nonchalantly.

“Don’t be so cold Ali. You know how I feel for you,” Farzana implored him.

“Then you must also know that I don’t like this emotional nonsense. At all

events, there's no use of such things. So you better leave. I don't know how your father will react if he comes to know that you're here."

"This is precisely my problem. Neither you nor father appreciates what I feel or what I want.

"Look Farzana your feelings or desires are no concern of mine. I'm going to my room. If you insist on seeing mother, you can wait until she wakes up."

While Ali was arguing with Farzana, Mrs Naqvi woke and came out of her room. As she saw her, Farzana could not control herself and tears rolled down her cheeks. Meanwhile, Ali left the scene.

Mrs Naqvi true to her nature hugged Farzana. "What's it?" she asked.

"I have come to see you and apologize for what father said to you the other day. But Ali is bent upon turning me out of the house," a sobbing Farzana replied.

"Forget what your father said. It's between us and him. In any event, you are not responsible for what he says or does," Mrs Naqvi said affectionately.

"Thanks aunt; you have always been too kind to me. But please tell me what I should do, for save you I have none to turn to."

Mrs Naqvi asked Farzana to make herself comfortable and brought her a glass of water. "Tell me what you want. I'll do whatever is possible for me to help you," she told Farzana.

Farzana was greatly consoled by Mrs Naqvi's kind words and began, "You remember when I came here last time, I met Ali…"

"Yes, I do," Mrs Naqvi interrupted her.

"While you were probably in the kitchen, Ali came closer to me and kissed me."

"He did so! I don't believe it."

"Yes he did," Farzana replied. "Though he didn't say anything, that was enough to drive me crazy and arouse my love for him. After remaining on tenterhooks for a few days I met Rashid and told him all about myself and Ali. Subsequently, on Rashid's request, Ali met him and told him that he didn't love me and that he'll be happier if Rashid married me. However, Rashid lied

to my father and told him that Ali had told him that he loved me, that we had physical relations and requested Rashid to break the engagement. When father came to know of this, he shot up and the rest you know."

"Oh I see! So Rashid played the proverbial bad guy," Mrs Naqvi remarked. "Why did he do that? We leave this for the moment. But this all started when Ali kissed you, which made you believe that he too loved you — the belief that you had always nourished. Isn't it?"

Mrs Naqvi first thought of calling Ali and seeking an explanation. But on second thought she didn't deem it fit, because it would put him into an embarrassing position. Besides, that might lead Ali to speak of Sara in Farzana's presence, which Mrs Naqvi didn't want. So she told Farzana to go home.

After Farzana had gone, Mrs Naqvi gave Ali an account of what the former had told her. "How do you account for your behavior?" she asked him.

The question drove Ali into embarrassment and he didn't utter a word. "Your silence will do us no good. You have to decide what you want or probably you don't know what you want."

"Mother I owe you and father an apology and to Farzana as well. But believe me what I did was purely involuntary and I even didn't realize what I was doing. Farzana is a nice girl but on my part, there's nothing between us. This is all I have to say," Ali explained.

"Ok, this settles the matter as far as you are concerned. But we also need to help Farzana. Why did Rashid lie about you to Javed Bhai? What I understand is that after hearing from Farzana that she loved you, he got jealous of you and thus poisoned the ears of Javed Bhai," Mrs Naqvi opined.

"But mother Rashid seemed to me a reasonable person."

"Appearances are often deceptive my son," Mrs Naqvi remarked. "But let's not get philosophical. I know you have much of that every day. Anyway, Farzana doesn't deserve a liar like Rashid. But the problem is how to bring her father around to this. Ok I'll think over it. But you had better concentrate on your studies."

Chapter 20

The White Mosque brigands continued to get music and video shops closed in adjoining areas and the police failed to stop them. The police did make repeated requests to the authorities to allow them to enter the seminary affiliated with the mosque but they were not allowed. The government in fact didn't take the matter seriously. Another reason was that religious parties were supporting the Malik Naseem government and he didn't want to annoy them.

On the other hand, the management and students of the White Mosque were encouraged by the reluctance of the law enforcement agencies to act against them and increased their activities. The students would go to the markets and warn women against shopping if they weren't accompanied by men. When they saw a young man and woman in the market, they would ask them whether they were related. If they failed to satisfy them, the students would beat up the man and threaten the woman. They would also direct women to clad themselves in *burqas*. All this created resentment among the residents of the area and they requested the government to bridle the White Mosque students but such requests fell on deaf ears of the authorities.

But then an incident took place, which aroused the authorities from their slumber. About one mile from the White Mosque was located a beauty-cum-fitness centre run by one Mrs Khan — a high class bitch in her younger days and now a top class pimp. Her fitness centre named Khan's Parlor supplied girls to the elite of the city including foreign diplomats.

The White Mosque students wanted to have the parlor closed and they sent a warning to Mrs Khan to wind up her business or face the consequences. But Mrs Khan didn't take this warning seriously, because she believed given her connections and customers no one dared to touch her.

But she had underestimated the zeal of the White Mosque students to rid the society of evil. One night, a band of the students, with the permission of Maulvi Zia, stormed into Khan's Parlor. They thrashed the staff and abducted two foreign diplomats, coming of a very powerful country. The diplomats were taken to the seminary and locked up. That was enough to shake the govt. After attempts by the authorities to secure the release of the diplomats had failed, for which there was mounting pressure from their home country, prime minister Malik Naseem personally made a call to Maulvi Zia and requested him to see him immediately.

Maulvi Zia, who was at that time in the capital, was keenly waiting for such a request. So in the evening, he drove to the prime minister house, where Malik Naseem was waiting for him.

"Maulvi sahib how are you?" Malik Naseem greeted him.

"By the grace of Allah I'm fine my brother but you seem to be a little uneasy."

"Yes indeed and you can get me out of my uneasiness."

"I'll be pleased to do anything I can," Maulvi Zia assured him.

"In that case, please let the diplomats free and make sure your students don't do such things in future," the prime minister told him plainly.

"I'm afraid this I cannot do," Maulvi Zia was equally plain.

"Why? Your students have kidnapped them and you know where they are. You just have to order them," Malik Naseem said angrily.

"I don't deny that my students have kidnapped the diplomats and we both know where they are —of course in my seminary — but I cannot order their release, simply because I ordered the abduction."

"Look Zia sahib, I have already given leeway to your students because I did not want to annoy you. But enough is enough. I can't give them license to act the way they want, especially when it risks our foreign relations. So you are advised to release them immediately, otherwise we would act and I can't guarantee the life and liberty of your students," Malik Naseem threatened the visitor.

"We never asked you to give us leeway or license. We had just asked you to honor your commitment that you made to me before you became the prime minister but you turned back on your word. As for your threats, if your men can storm into my mosque, go ahead," Maulvi Zia spoke in the same tone.

"Maulvi sahib I know I haven't been able to honor my commitment and I'm profoundly sorry for that. As I told you earlier, my hands are tied. I need some time, some space before I can terminate the operation against the militants. You have never been in the government but I'm and therefore understand the constraints of the govt. But if you create problems for me, my constraints would increase and it would become increasingly difficult for me to help your cause, which is also my cause. You know, the army chief called me earlier in

the day and told me to secure the release of the diplomats at the earliest. You know the nationality of these diplomats. Their ambassador called on me last night and I assured him that his men would be free in twenty-four hours. What I'm to do now," Malik Naseem said.

"Now I understand what makes you so concerned — the army chief, the ambassador. But if you are answerable to these people, I'm also answerable to my people — the very people who brought you at the helm. These people ask me when will the military operation against them come to an end? When will an unconditional ceasefire ensue? What I'm to tell them? How am I to satisfy them? You are concerned about couple of foreigners, but you damn care about thousands of my people. Probably you care only about yourself," Maulvi Zia said with contempt.

"Yes I'm concerned about myself and who else would not be? I have secured this position after decades of struggle and I wouldn't allow anyone to unseat me. But my position is also beneficial for your cause — if not today, tomorrow certainly — because the alternative to me is the previous government, whose foremost agenda was to root out militancy. So please help me today so that I can help you tomorrow. If you want to play, then go for a win-win situation rather than a lose-lose one," Malik Naseem implored Zia."

"Here you're Malik sahib. We should both play for a win-win situation. If I release the diplomats, it'll be a victory for you, but what would I get? You talk about a win-win situation but you actually want a win-lose situation. So please come up with a win-win solution," Maulvi Zia advised the premier.

"And what can be a win-win solution in these circumstances?" a bewildered Malik Naseem asked?

"It's very simple," Maulvi Zia put it with a smile." You release the twenty militants that security forces nabbed last week from Peshawar and I'll set the diplomats free. What can be a better win-win situation?"

"But those militants are very dangerous and carried head money of at least one million rupees each," Malik Naseem objected.

"That's why I'm offering this deal to you."

Malik Naseem realized that he was checkmated by Maulvi Zia and that he had no option except to say 'yes' to his proposal. "Ok but I need to take the army chief into confidence before I go ahead with the proposal," he told Zia.

"That's fine with me. Talk to your masters and then get back to me. I'm in no

haste," a triumphant Maulvi Zia remarked and walked out of the prime minister's office with his head held high.

In few hours, he was informed that the militants had been set free. Accordingly, he ordered his students to release the captive diplomats.

While sitting in the department's library, Ali received a note from Dr Junaid asking him to see the latter immediately.

"Sir you wanted to see me," Ali enquired as he entered the professor's office.

Dr Junaid remained silent and mentioned Ali to a chair. "I have called you to tell you that the faculty is not satisfied with your performance. You level of participation in the class is unsatisfactory. In fact, most of the time you are conspicuous by your silence. Nor are your assignments up-to-the-mark. Do let me know frankly what's wrong with you."

Dr Junaid's remarks left Ali high and dry. He looked abstractly at the professor but then picked up courage and began: "Sir I'm sorry that I have disappointed you. At times I have a lot to say but cannot speak for the fear of being wrong. But sir I assure you that I'll do my best to come up to your expectations."

"I trust you'll. In case you feel there is a special area where you need counseling, please don't hesitate a bit to inform me or any other member of the faculty," Dr Junaid told him.

"Thanks sir. I'll." Ali half rose thinking that his interview was over.

"Please keep seated. There's another matter I want to talk to. Whatever I say should be treated as confidential. I believe I can count on you," Dr Junaid spoke with an air of secrecy.

"Sir rest assured," Ali replied and tried to guess what that confidential matter could be.

"How much you know about Sara," Dr Junaid put an unexpected question.

"Sara! You mean Sara who is my classmate?"

"Yes it's the same Sara I'm referring to," Dr Junaid affirmed. "I'm asking this, because I'm told in the department, it's you who are on most intimate terms with her."

“Sir not much I’m afraid, except that she is the most intelligent student in our class.” Ali had decided that he wouldn’t say a word about Sara’s father to Dr Junaid, because she had seen him at the residence of Maulvi Zia.

“You don’t know her family?”

“I’m afraid sir not. Actually, our discussions are only academic. She has never asked me about my family and I haven’t either.”

“If I ask you to do me a favor and tell me about her family and personal life, would you be kind enough to do so?” Dr Junaid asked.

Ali took a deep breath as if to muster courage to turn down the request. “Sir if you want to know anything about Sara, why don’t you ask her directly?”

“If I need to ask her, I’ll. But should I presume that you are not going to oblige me?”

“I’m sorry sir but your presumption is correct. I think I should be off now.”

Dr Junaid looked at Ali angrily and nodded.

Ali came out of Dr Junaid’s office trying to figure out why the professor was interested in knowing about Sara’s family. “May be it has something to do with Sara’s father or her visit to Maulvi Zia. Maybe he knows that Sara’s father is Seth Nisar and that he works for Maulvi Zia. So probably he wants to ascertain the connection between the two.”

Ali’s chain of thought was broken by the sweet voice of Sara. “Where you were? You weren’t in the library?” she asked.

“Actually, I was called by Dr Junaid, who advised me to improve my performance,” he spoke half truth and concealed half.

“I guess he was nice with you.”

“Yes indeed. He offered me any help that I need.”

“That’s nice. I have also got to see him to discuss my research proposal. Can you wait for me in the library?”

Ali didn’t want Sara to meet Dr Junaid. “He has some guests,” he lied to her.

"Ok I'll wait or may visit his home in the evening." But then noticing that Ali wasn't listening to her asked him where he was.

Ali, who was in a dilemma whether to tell Sara all about Dr Junaid decided that he should tell her, especially when she intended to visit his home.

"Sara there's something important I want to talk to you." Ali said in a serious tone. "But promise me you'll keep it to yourself."

Sara was surprised at that seriousness and confidentiality on the part of Ali and promised to do so. Ali gave her the full account of what Dr Junaid had asked him about her.

Sara took a deep breath and thanked Ali for the information. "I guess you are right. It has something to do with my father and Maulvi Zia. Ok I'm going to see Dr Junaid but will keep our conversation under my hat. Can you wait for me?"

Sara went to Dr Junaid's office, while Ali made his way to the library. On the way, he met Javed. "Friend Sara was looking for you. Did you meet her?" Javed asked him.

"Yes. She has just gone to see Dr Junaid." Let's go to the cafeteria. Be my guest," Ali offered him.

"You seem to be getting along well with Sara," Javed remarked.

Ali didn't like anyone on the campus talking about him and Sara. But he knew Javed was good natured and didn't talk out of malice. So he didn't mind Javed's remarks. "We are just friends. Sara is a nice girl."

"But if I'm not wrong, you are beginning to like her. Aren't you?"

Ali blushed and confessed. "But I'm sharing this only with you. Don't let anyone, especially Riaz, get wind of that."

"Don't worry I can keep secrets. But tell me is it a one-sided affair?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. But I have the feeling that she is also taking interest in me. Whether that feeling is strong enough to be called love I'm not sure."

"Have you met outside the campus?"

Ali thought for a while whether he should tell Javed that they both have been to each other's home and then decided he had better not.

"What about you? Are you interested in any girl?" Ali asked Javed.

"If you don't mind, I was first interested in Sara but I soon realized she wasn't for me. Then I thought about Naila. Like us, she comes of a middle class family. Her father is a civil servant, who'll retire in couple of years. He and my father have worked together in the same department. Neither Naila holds any attraction for me; nor do I for her. Look you mayn't like it but I have little hesitation in admitting that I don't want to marry a girl who shares my class. I want to marry a rich girl, who can give me wealth and luxury. I'm here, so to speak, for wife hunting as most of girl students including Naila are for husband hunting," Javed was frank in his confession.

"Why do you want to have a rich wife? You can get what you want by dint of hard work."

"Hard work! There's no correlation between hard work and wealth my dear friend. What will I get at the most by dint of hard work? A job worth a few thousand rupees. You know the house where we live is a government accommodation, which we'll have to vacate once my father retires. Hard work can give you necessities; it can't give you luxuries. It can give you money, it cannot give you wealth. Wealth is the gift of luck and I can't count on my luck to get wealthy. So I must prey upon someone who is already wealthy. It's as simple as that."

"But, Javed, wealth isn't everything. The real thing is happiness, for which wealth is not essential," Ali objected.

"It's all bookish dear. If you have wealth, you can buy anything — fame, power, loyalty, comfort. Name anything and I'll tell you that wealth can buy it. Wealth may not be a sufficient condition for happiness but it's invariably the necessary condition."

"Well I don't agree with you. My parents aren't wealthy but to be sure they are happy. But let's leave this discussion for some other time, preferably for the classroom. Now tell me have you had any success?" Ali asked.

"Not yet I'm afraid," Javed replied. "But I' haven't given in. I have couple of targets — of course outside the department. Wish me success. Would you?"

"Of course I do. But I also wish you see reason and learn to rely on your own potentials."

“On my part, I wish you get Sara. But have you opened your heart to her?” Javed queried.

“I have thought over this but haven’t been able to make up my mind.”

“I guess it’s not the question of making up your mind. It’s a matter of mustering up the courage, which we middle class people are remarkably deficient in, “Javed observed.

“Your observation is valid. But I don’t want to act in a haste. Unless I get some positive signal from Sara, I had better remain silent.”

“You may be right but you see girls like Sara are in high demand. What I fear is that someone wealthier, more intelligent and more handsome than you may cajole her. You know in our society, girls, even if they are as wealthy and intelligent as Sara, are impressed by the man who takes the initiative,” Javed opined.

“Well if that’s the case, why didn’t you try your luck with Sara?”

“I would have done so had I had the faintest of hope of success. In fact, let me share it with you and only you, I did in the beginning make some advances towards her but the message in her eye was clear — fuck off,” Javed confided in Ali and began to laugh. “But your case is different or should I say better? He said.

“Ok I’ll think over that.”

“Do think my dear but your thought must beget action. Don’t be a Hamlet.”

“But I don’t want to be a Macbeth either,” Ali replied and then realized that Sara might have returned and been waiting for him in the library. “I’m to prepare notes so I’m going to the library. Would you come?”

“No my dear I have got better things to do,” Javed replied and they went their ways.

Ali returned home with two considerations uppermost in his mind: One that he needed to perform better so that his teachers have no cause for complaint; second whether it was safe for him to open his heart to Sara. Javed’s word of warning that girls like Sara were in high demand was echoing in his mind. As Ali saw it, the two problems were inter-related.

"For," he thought, "if I perform well in the class, if I actively participate in the discussion and earn good grades that would impress Sara and strengthen my case for her. So first I need to give greater attention to my studies and come out of my shell. I should try to dominate the discussions and put intriguing questions to the professors. This means I need to fully digest the reading material and go to the class fully prepared. However, at the same time I should also throw some hints at Sara in a subtle way and then see how she reacts. This means from now onward my focus should be only on Sara and studies. All else should be secondary." Ali decided.

Ali was happy on reaching that decision. At the same time, he felt proud that unlike Javed, he was interested in Sara not for her wealth and fortune but because of her personal qualities. But he also admitted to himself that should he marry Sara, he would share her enormous wealth. "That will be a collateral benefit to me," he himself summed up the situation.

The Farzana factor, Ali thought, was one thing that could potentially distract his attention. "I don't understand Farzana. She is well aware that our marriage is impossible but still she insists on that. This is the sign of an immature person hoping the impossible to happen. But I also feel sorry for her. She is otherwise a nice girl but her emotional nature verging on stupidity is her greatest flaw and I hope it doesn't turn out to be a tragic flaw. May God show her the light of reason! In any event, for me Farzana's chapter never existed at all and even if it existed it is closed once and for all. Whether she marries Rashid or not, it's none of my business. I think I made a mistake by meeting Rashid and thus became part of the controversy. In future I'll not get myself embroiled into her affair," he committed to himself.

Accordingly, Ali started paying greater attention to his studies. However, the more he studied, the more confused he became. When he studied materialism, it appeared to him to be the true philosophy. "After all what materialism says in a nutshell — that the world around us is real and what is not perceived by the senses doesn't exist — nothing can be simpler, to-the-point and borne out by our everyday experience."

But when he turned to idealism, the shortcomings of materialism were exposed to him. "What reason do we have for maintaining that what cannot be perceived by the senses doesn't exist? What reason do we have for believing that the senses give us true and infallible knowledge? My senses have often deceived me. Hence, it's doubtful whether any credible philosophy can be erected on the edifice of sense perception. In fact, the senses give us chaotic knowledge and only reason can turn that chaos into order."

But further studies convinced him of the limits of reason as well. "Reason," he realized, "can hardly give us fresh knowledge about the world. Reason, for instance, tells me that a person cannot at the same time both exist and not exist but whether that person actually exists or has ever existed, reason by itself is incapable of informing me. Only my senses can tell me. Either I personally see that person or hear or read about him. So ultimately I am thrown back to rely on my senses to know about the world or even about myself.

"For whether I have ten fingers or eleven or nine; my heart is on the left, centre or right; my hair are black, brown or grey; my nose is flat, long or sharp; the color of my eyes is black, blue or green; I'm tall, short or of middle height; my complexion is fair, dark or yellow; I walk, crawl or run, no amount of logical reasoning will unfold to me the truth. Either I touch my organs or just look at them to know their number, size, color, shape and location. And if reason has so serious constraints, any philosophy which enthrones reason can hardly be a credible philosophy. But if both senses and reason have severe constraints, how can we get infallible knowledge either about the world or about ourselves?" Ali wondered.

Though intellectually confused, Ali was clear about one thing — that he loved Sara and had to get her. But he was also painfully aware of his constraints vis-à-vis her. "Reason tells me that Sara will not reciprocate my love for she is far superior to me in all respects. But then reason can and does err. And it may err in this case as well. So I should shun skepticism and have what the poet Wordsworth called the willing suspension of disbelief."

However, Ali's willing suspension of disbelief didn't become strong enough to allow him to express his love to Sara. During the vacation, he met Sara almost every week and got the opportunity to spend time with her alone on every occasion but didn't receive a 'positive' signal from her. In the meantime, the summer vacation ended.

The way Maulvi Zia had successfully secured the release of the militants made him fully realize that in politics the only effective antidote to power was power. The same Malik Naseem, who was even reluctant to see him, had not only invited him but also bowed to his demand.

"If we are to bring the military operation against the militants to a halt, requests, petitions and supplications will be of little use; rather the government must be forced to do so. And this is possible only if we are strong enough to dictate to the powers that be," Maulvi Zia shared his views with Dr

Junaid.

"You are right Zia sahib. Actually it was an error of judgment on my part," admitted Dr Junaid. "When I floated the idea of the change in the government, I was of the view that if we had a government that is sympathetic to our demands then it would help our cause. But now I have realized that the government of the day is sympathetic only to itself. It is interested only in its own survival and consolidation. When there's a conflict of interest, allies become enemies and when there's is compatibility of interest, enemies becomes allies, foes turn into friends. In politics then there are no permanent friends no eternal foes. The government of Malik Naseem released our *mujahideen*, because doing so was in its interest. So you're right, we have to match power by power."

"You know I had decided to set the diplomats free in any case, because the ambassador of a Muslim country, to which we owe allegiance, had personally requested me for that. But I knew Malik Naseem and the people behind him would find it impossible to resist the pressure for the release of the diplomats. I also knew that they wouldn't dare to order the police to enter the mosque. So I played tough and succeeded. And that's is the only effective way of dealing with these rascals," Maulvi Zia observed. "But now the question is how to build on our one-time success."

Without waiting for an answer, he continued, "There's a limit to what our students can do — and mind you they have done a lot. We should also avoid doing anything which may discredit us in public eye. And if we continue kidnapping people, it will for sure discredit us in public eye — even if we do so in the name of religion and morality. We need to show our strength; there's no doubt about that. But we should do so in a subtle way. We have only to impress the people in power that we are too strong to be ignored. I have been thinking over this for last many days and I have hit upon an idea, which I would like to share with you."

"My pleasure," a curious Dr Junaid nodded.

Maulvi Zia explained what he had in mind. "Yes that's nice," Dr Junaid responded after the former had finished. "We should act upon your plan immediately."

"Well there's another thing I want to tell you," Maulvi Zia told Dr Junaid. "You remember a girl interviewed me some time back on *madaris* education. I saw her coming out of your university the other day."

"Really!" Dr Junaid exclaimed. "Either she studies in the university or she

was there to meet someone. If she studies in the university, she was lying to you. But why did she lie to you? Anyhow did you have a chance to follow her?"

"No I'm afraid. I was passing by the university when I got sight of her. But before the driver stopped the car, she had disappeared."

"One thing is clear," Dr Junaid observed, "she is in the town and if she really is what she told you, you can expect her."

Chapter 21

It was the first day after summer vacation. Life had returned to the university. The students were back with renewed expectations and fresh plans. Some hoped to do better in studies; others expected to excel in extra-curricular activities. The boys hoped this time they would be successful at seducing pretty girls; the girls planned how to be successful at husband hunting. For many, the final year of their studies had started after which they would be thrown into hard practical life. What they did or failed to do during that year would determine their future.

In the philosophy department, all the students were present in the classroom. Though most of them had been meeting every week, they had formally assembled after three months. During this period, Sara and Ali had come closer to each other.

"Who is supposed to take the first session and on which subject?" Sara asked her classmates. "They haven't notified the time table."

"If you don't know then probably none of us knows," Javed remarked. "But don't worry, you'll have your answer in few minutes."

And the answer came when the door opened and much to their surprise a tall, slim and smart young man entered. "Hello I'm Ahmad Rameez and just three days back joined your department. Earlier, I was teaching in the Peshawar University," the new professor introduced himself.

After the introduction was complete, the professor told them that he would be covering the 'Living Issues in Philosophy.'

"Since you have completed your first semester, you must have been well grounded in the basic concepts of philosophy. This makes my task easier since I need only to apply these concepts to the contemporary issues and problems in philosophy. I want to make it clear at the very outset that I don't believe in teaching in the traditional sense of the word; instead I believe in sharing views openly, frankly and candidly. So please don't hesitate to share your views no matter how ridiculous they may seem to you at times."

The young professor cast a glance across the class to see their reaction and then continued: "A common charge against philosophers has been that they are divorced from the real world; that the problems they grapple with have little relevance to the contemporary society; that they dwell in a world of their own far from the madding crowd; and that the questions they raise have either no answers at all or where the answers can be found they do little to

contributing to social good. It is alleged that while science gives us knowledge, control and power and art affords us pleasure, relief and entertainment, philosophy gives us nothing but unending skepticism. Such allegations of course are unfounded and expose popular prejudice against philosophy and philosophers. The point that I want to make is that while the problems of philosophy largely transcend time and space, the real significance of philosophy consists in its contemporary relevance, in helping us reconstruct a better society and a better world. As Karl Marx said, philosophers must go beyond understanding the world to changing it."

Prof Rameez paused for few seconds to capture the breath and then added: "In the course of our interaction, we'll try and see how basic philosophical tools can help us understand and improve the society and the world we live in. Any question, comment or observation?" he invited the class.

There wasn't any response, partly because the boys and girls hadn't yet returned to their normal classroom mode after long summer vacation and partly because they were interested more in the young professor than his statements. Naila in particular was keenly watching him. She was impressed by his attractive appearance and fluent English. Prof Rameez also felt Naila's attention on him.

"Well if you have nothing to say, then we may proceed. We have twenty-five credit hours for this module and we have the flexibility to identify about ten contemporary issues that we may discuss. Interestingly, you also happen to be ten in number. So each one of you will propose one issue. How simple it is! So we start with you the young lady," Prof Rameez looked at Sara.

"Well I confess you have caught us off-guard. But since we have to propose one topic each now and I have a background in economics, I'll go for the current economic order, that is, capitalism," Sara spoke.

Prof Rameez noted the topic proposed by Sara and then said 'next.' Javed who was sitting next to Sara thought for a moment and then proposed 'democracy'. Subsequently the rest of the students came up with their topics until only Ali was left. All the time that his classmates were proposing the issues for discussion, Ali was thinking what he should propose. At least two subjects that came to his mind were already proposed by them so that when it was his turn to speak, he was blank.

"Yes by now you must have decided which issue to suggest," Prof Rameez addressed Ali.

"Sir pardon me but you have still got to know Ali. He never decides in a

haste. He needs at least one week to make up his mind," Riaz remarked sarcastically.

"Is it so?" a surprised professor Rameez asked Ali.

"Terrorism," Ali spoke spontaneously much to his own surprise. "Terrorism is a uniquely contemporary issue, which is especially relevant to our society. So I'll go for that."

"Arguably, the most interesting topic," Prof Rameez noted. "So we have our list complete. I appreciate that you need to be given some time at least to prepare yourself. What I'll do is to deliver couple of lectures on the contemporary world — a sort of overview — and then we'll start discussing the issues you have identified. We have two classes every week so you'll have sufficient time to get yourself prepared. Each one of you will make an oral presentation on his or her topic followed by questions and answers from the peers and I'll wrap up the discussion. This will be a graded activity and marks will be given on the basis of how original your views are and how logically you defend the same. There will be complete freedom of expression in the class and you can come up with any views as long as you know what you are saying and as long as you can defend them. Now the difficult decision: who will be the first to make their presentation? Of course, the later you speak, the more time you'll have to get yourself prepared. But the earlier you speak, the more original will be your presentation. So any volunteers?"

There wasn't any volunteer, which disappointed the professor a bit.

"Sir why don't you decide yourself," Naila suggested. Others endorsed her.

"Well, What I do in such situations is to decide the order in which students will speak on the basis of some criterion. And the criterion that comes to my mind today is your first name. So the order of presentations will be alphabetical."

"This means Ali will be the first to speak," Naila remarked with a smile.

"Sir can't you reverse the alphabetical order. I'm prepared to make the first presentation." Sara tried to help Ali out.

"No sir. Since you have made the decision, we should abide by it," Riaz insisted.

"Ok I'm prepared to be the first speaker," Ali settled the problem before anyone else could speak.

“So that’s it. We meet day after tomorrow. It’s 1st today and Ali’s turn will come on 15th followed by others in alphabetical order.” Prof Rameez concluded.

Chapter 22

It was seven in the evening. In the conference room of the prime minister's secretariat was present the top civil and military leadership of the country including Malik Naseem himself. The meeting was supposed to start at 6.45 but they were waiting for one person. The prime minister anxiously glanced at the big clock in front of him and then looked enquiringly at his military secretary.

"Sir I have just talked to his chief of staff; he'll be here in few minutes," the latter assured him.

At half past 7, the conference room's door opened and appeared the imposing figure of Gen. Obaid — the all-powerful chief of the armed forces. All those present stood up to receive him. Those in uniform saluted him. The general answered their greetings with a nod of the head and then took his seat next to the premier.

"Sorry gentlemen for having kept you waiting. Some urgent business crept up," he gave a brief explanation for his late arrival."

"Never mind sir. We understand you're on the trot," the prime minister politely stated. "With your permission we may start."

"Yes of course."

"In fact this meeting is being held at the behest of the honorable army chief to consider a potentially explosive situation. As we all remember, some time back some diplomats were kidnapped from a fitness centre in the capital by the zealous, self-righteous students of the White Mosque seminary. We eventually secured their release but we had to set several notorious militants free in return. We thought the matter settled. But we were mistaken, let me admit, as it was just the beginning. Emboldened by their success, the militants started using the White Mosque premises as their base camp in the capital and we have intelligence reports that they have accumulated heavy arms and ammunition there. Not only that, some of the most wanted militants are hiding on the premises and planning their clandestine activities right there. What is their ultimate plan we don't know with certainty. But the very fact that there is a militants' safe heaven right in the heart of the capital is a cause for grave concern for us and something needs to be done urgently and thoroughly," the prime minister read the introductory remarks from a script probably given to him by the army, and then looked at Gen. Obaid.

The general took a deep puff from his Cuban cigar and then began: "There is

really an explosive situation in the making and that's why I had impressed upon the prime minister the need to think through it and then come up with a solution. We certainly can't let the militants strengthen themselves right under our nose, especially when my men are offering tremendous sacrifices in tribal areas. Yesterday the American ambassador called on me and expressed his concern at the developments and requested me for a decisive action to stem the rot. If I'm not wrong, the man behind the militants is Maulvi Zia, who happens to be a coalition partner of the present government and a personal friend of the prime minister, and who facilitated his presence at the helm. So my first question is whether the government has the political will to act against him."

"Certainly we have," the prime minister replied putting his hand on the chest. Maulvi Zia did help me reach where I'm but it doesn't mean he can dictate to me."

"But Mr Prime Minister you can't deny that you had promised Maulvi Zia to bring the military operation against the militants to a halt and give unconditional amnesty to the militants," Lt. Gen. Rehan, the head of military intelligence, who was known even in the army for his bluntness, remarked.

Malik Naseem got uneasy at those remarks but tried to clarify his position. "You are right Rehan sahib I did make such commitment. But this is what politics is all about. I needed the support of Maulvi Zia to get into this office so I promised him whatever he insisted on. But in politics promises are not meant to be kept. And as I assured the chief before my appointment as prime minister, I'll toe the line of the army. And if the top brass wants me to get tough on Maulvi Zia I'll. In fact, general sahib will bear me out that I haven't requested him even once for an end to the military operation. And I want to reiterate that I have no love lost for the militants or their mentors."

"So it's decided that the government will act against Maulvi Zia and the militants. Now the question is how it should proceed," Gen. Obaid pronounced. "Do the civilians have any plan?"

Malik Naseem looked at his interior minister and trusted colleague Afaq Ahmad, and asked him to answer the question.

"The interior ministry and civilian intelligence agencies are fully alive to the dangerous situation and we'll act to defuse it even though politically it will be a difficult decision for us. The major problem that we face is that the flashpoint is the premises of a mosque, and a well-known mosque. You know our people — they can bear anything with mindless submission but when it is a question of religion they can be incited easily. So my point is that if we raid

the White Mosque, it will be interpreted as a sacrilegious act and we may have to face tremendous popular resistance," Minister Ahmad explained the government's position, which the prime minister endorsed.

"I'm sorry but you are simply shying away from your responsibility. Besides, we have just decided to get tough on the militants and your reply shows you civilians are having second thoughts. We want to hear your plans for action and not the pretexts for inaction," Lt. Gen. Rehan stated with his usual bluntness.

"Rehan is right. If you have any plans then share with us and if you don't have any, then we'll have to step in. But don't mess up things. If you have nothing better to say then please shut up," Gen. Obaid gave the interior minister a slap on the wrist, putting his weight behind his lieutenant.

Before Afaq Ahmad could reply, Malik Naseem, fearing that his minister might say something that would offend the generals, intervened: "We'll appreciate if you can help us general sahib. We civilians have a lot to learn from the men in uniform."

"You politicians know how to reign but not how to rule," Gen. Obaid remarked contemptuously. "Rehan can you share your contingency plans?"

"Yes sir. "We understand that raiding the White Mosque shouldn't be our first line of action and that there are softer ways in which we can achieve our objectives." Lt. Gen. Rehan briefly explained those softer ways to which the prime minister gave his formal consent.

Chapter 23

Ali was taking his assignment rather seriously. He had never made a presentation before and wanted to give a good account of himself in his debut presentation. "I should first understand the phenomenon of terrorism and then see how the tools of philosophy can be applied to it," he thought.

Accordingly, he decided to seek guidance from his parents, especially his father, who had filed a number of stories and features on terrorism. So after dinner, he told his parents about his assignment and where he needed their help.

"I can tell you about terrorism in a general sense and then your father will be in a better position to dilate upon its concrete expression in Pakistan," Mrs Naqvi began. "Briefly, terrorism as I understand it is a weapon for achieving some political objective, a weapon which can be used both by the state and against the state. In fact, contrary to popular perception state terrorism has been more widespread than anti-state terrorism. Whenever the state's authority is based on sheer force, we have state terrorism. Anarchists as well as Marxists are of the view that the state is essentially a child of force and so by implication an agency of terrorism.

"Terrorism against the state is more often than not a form of political protest, a form gone violent because the avenues of peaceful expression of political discontent are not available," Mrs Naqvi continued.

"But mother can there be a justification for terrorism?" Ali questioned.

"To me there can never be. But for terrorists whether acting against the state or for the state, there definitely is. Remember one thing: Terrorists working against the state are criminals in that they defy the law of the land, but to be sure they aren't the ordinary criminals. They fight for a cause and they have a strong faith in their cause. However the state may label them, for themselves and their supporters, terrorists are freedom fighters and in our case the soldiers of Islam or *mujahideen*. Terrorism thus has an ideology and the best way to attack terrorism is either to attack that ideology or to alleviate the discontent of the people that underlies terrorism," Mrs Naqvi answered.

"Forgive me Fatima. But if, as you say, terrorists have a strong faith in their cause, wouldn't attacking their ideology harden them and thus prove counterproductive?" Mr Naqvi joined the discussion.

"It may some time," Mrs Naqvi admitted. "But if terrorism is to succeed it must have a popular basis. However, if it can be shown to the people that the

cause for which the terrorists are fighting is not a worthy one, terrorism can be attenuated. Popular support, I may say, is the ground under terrorists. If the ground gets slipped, their movement will fizzle out."

"Can force be an answer to terrorism?" Ali asked.

"Force has been used successfully to put down terrorism. Its most recent example is Sri Lanka, where the government crushed Tamil uprising after facing years of resistance. So yes force can be an answer," Mrs Naqvi replied.

"One last question before I turn to father: Is it possible to launch a popular resistance movement without in any manner resorting to the use of force?"

"Theoretically it's very much possible. People may use constitutional means to get their demands accepted. However, in practical terms, the use of only constitutional means is subject to several factors. For instance, is the use of constitutional means open to the people? Do the people see any tangible chances of success if they use such means? What kind of ideology is the basis of the movement? If the ideology itself is diabolical, then chances of a bloodless struggle are very much limited. What kind of leadership is at the helm? Movements led by the leaders who believe in passive resistance or are constitutionalist are more likely to eschew violence. The struggle for Indian independence was for instance largely peaceful partly because the two frontline leaders, I mean Gandhi and Jinnah, were pacifists," Mrs Naqvi explained.

"Now father it's your turn," Ali addressed Mr Naqvi. "How do you see the terrorism that we are facing?"

Mr Naqvi took a deep breath and then began: "Much has been said and written about this menace. But briefly, this represents a classic case of political exploitation of religion. I can give you a brief account of the genesis of this menace."

"That will be nice. But there's a counter point that the current spate of terrorism in Pakistan is the result of the country's role of a frontline ally of the United States in the campaign against terrorism. Therefore, the only way to rid the country of this menace is to shun the alliance with the US. Is it really so?" Ali asked.

"Well, Mr Naqvi answered, "I don't dispute that suicide terrorism has struck Pakistan only in the wake of the country's post 9/11 alliance with the US. Yet the roots of the malady lie much deeper. The terrorism that we are facing is largely an embodiment of religious extremism, which earlier expressed itself

in sectarian killings. The bottles may be new but the wine is old.

"To trace the roots of terrorism," Mr Naqvi continued, "you need to go back to Pakistan's involvement in the US led war against its prime antagonist, the USSR in Afghanistan. In 1979, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the US deemed it to be a move in the USSR global strategy — expansion of communism. The invasion of Afghanistan coincided with the advent of the revolution in Iran whereby the pro-American monarchy was abolished and an anti-US Islamic regime set up. The change in Iran struck at US influence in the region. Hence, when the USSR dispatched its troops to Afghanistan, the US reaction was prompt and tough.

"The Americans wanted to secure the support of neighboring countries of Afghanistan, so that they could launch an effective anti-Russia campaign. The US could not get the support of India and Iran for different reasons: India was a staunch ally of the USSR, while Washington-Tehran relations were on the ebb. However, in Pakistan, the US found an ally, and it was through the former that the latter found its war against the USSR in Afghanistan.

"The problem before the then government in Pakistan, which happened to be dictatorial, was how to justify its involvement in the Afghan war. And their answer was simple: let's give the war religious meaning. Hence, the Afghan war became a jihad and the Afghanis on the US side *mujahideen*. The illegitimate Ziaul Haq regime, which itself was desperately looking for legitimacy as well as political and economic support, welcomed the Islamisation of the Afghan war. The people were made to believe that the communist USSR invasion of Afghanistan had endangered Islam and therefore it was the religious duty of the government and people of Pakistan to fight in the war on the side of America, which was fighting for Islam. You see America was portrayed as fighting the war of Islam!" Mr Naqvi said.

"However, with the decline in the USSR's superpower stature, before its eventual disintegration, and realization on the part of the Soviet leadership that their Afghan adventure had proved a misadventure, Moscow decided to pull out from Afghanistan. With that the US involvement in Afghanistan fizzled out. Hence, in 1989 when the Soviets left Afghanistan, the Americans also said good-bye to the Afghans. The US closed its embassy in Kabul because of what they called security concerns leaving the warring Afghans to themselves. The US departure showed that its interest in Afghanistan was purely strategic dictated by its national interest and not born of its concern for Islam or the Afghans.

"However, for Pakistan the impact of the Afghan campaign was disastrous. The Afghan war resulted in massive supply of arms and money to Pakistan.

But this money was spent not on the welfare of the people but on recruiting militants and rewarding generals. Since the Afghan crisis was portrayed as a conflict between Islam and *kufr,* activists of many religious outfits fought in the war, who were provided money and arms in a generous way. These militants knew only one way of living — living by the sword. They also needed an enemy. If the enemy was not a Russian, it could be a Muslim of the rival sect. Hence, the training and arms which the militants had received were later used against rival creeds resulting in enormous sectarian violence.

"Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan war also strengthened the notion that Pakistan should be made the citadel of Islam and that it is the duty of Pakistanis to actively support Muslim resistance movements all over the world. The Soviet humiliation in Afghanistan also made the *jihadis* believe that they can defeat an adversary however strong. Hence, the *jihadis* made their way into India, China, Chechnya and elsewhere. In turn, Pakistan received militants from different parts of the world. The *jihadis'* infiltration into China was the main reason why Beijing stopped supporting Pakistan on the Kashmir issue," Mr Naqvi explained.

"Where would you fit in ideology here," Ali queried.

"The *jihadis* would also have us believe that Islam provides only for a monolithic society in which different cultures or sub-cultures cannot co-exist; rather they have to be merged with the so-called Islamic culture. If preaching cannot effect that merger, force can be, and must be, used. If such an interpretation of Islam were to be accepted, then the use of force to remove cultural diversity would become legitimate and freedom of conscience, which underlies all moral freedom, become meaningless. There would be only one creed and one moral code, not by choice but by force. Such an interpretation of Islam would not only divest society of all ethical freedom but also breed mayhem and chaos as *jihadis* would wade through blood if need be to purge society of what they consider to be un-Islamic beliefs and practices," Mr Naqvi answered.

"What has been the role of the madaris?" Mrs Naqvi asked.

"In breeding and nurturing religious militancy," Mr Naqvi said, "the *madaris* have played a lethal role. The pen is bloodier than the sword and this is perfectly applicable to our *madaris*. The *madaris* teach negation, and hence repudiation, of doctrines, rituals and moral standards different from theirs. Hence, those who profess a different creed or have a different moral standard are looked upon as evil. Women who do not put on veil or men who do not have a beard are considered impious. Men and women who mix with one another are regarded as essentially wicked. Those who listen to music are

deemed to commit a grave sin. All such wicked or impious people have to be reformed — by the use of force if need be.

"The education imparted in the *madaris* instead of inculcating in students a dispassionate quest for truth or at least enabling them to take to some socially useful profession, indoctrinates in them hatred for other creeds. The students are taught that only their creed is based on truth, whereas the rest are an incarnation of evil whose elimination is a most sacred duty of theirs. The reward of performing that duty, they are taught, is an everlasting life of pleasure in the paradise. Most of the students owing to their impressionable age come to believe this stuff. Hence, when they leave their institutions, their hearts are filled with the strong desire to carry out their sacred duty. The *madaris* also churn out sectarian propaganda in the form of inflammatory literature, which denounces followers of rival creeds as *kafirs,* who must either be coerced into conversion or exterminated.

"It is such an erroneous view of Islam that lies behind religious extremism in Pakistan, which has expressed itself in sectarian violence, suicide blasts, burning of schools and video shops. No doubt, growing injustices in society, poverty and illiteracy have also contributed to terrorism. But one needs to be mindful of the fact that terrorism also has an ideological basis and in case of Pakistan the ideological basis is provided by the monolithic-cum-militant view of Islam," Mr Naqvi finished.

"What about Pakistan's post 9-11 alliance with America?" Ali asked.

"Blaming America for the instability and violence in Pakistan would not solve the problem. Nor should we expect Washington to change its strategy for the sake of Pakistan. No country will do that. The US Afghan policy is dictated by what it perceives to be its national interest. At best, we can try and convince the Americans that their tactics, such as drone attacks, will weaken efforts to defeat militancy. But the basic responsibility for defeating militants remains our own," Mr Naqvi explained.

"Then what's the solution to the problem?" Ali queried.

"Well the solution lies with us," Mr Naqvi answered. "The government will have to fight on many fronts. Strong action needs to be taken against the militants who do not surrender. There has to be a real fight against poverty and injustices, so that people do not become a tool in the hands of terrorist outfits out of desperation and frustration. The government should also fight religious extremism on ideological front. The view propagated by successive governments and even today by religious parties that Pakistan was meant to be a theocratic, monolithic state and a citadel of Islam and that it is our duty to

practically support Muslim resistance movements all over the world needs to be corrected. It is largely because of such misleading views that Pakistan has become a fortress of terrorism, upon which religious extremists from all-over the world look as their refuge. This is how, my son, I look upon the terrorism problem in our society," Mr Naqvi said.

Ali had fruitful discussion with his parents on terrorism and he considered himself fortunate that he had such enlightened and considerate parents with whom he could discuss anything. The account that his parents had given him was essentially political. But now the problem before him was how to go beyond politics to treat terrorism as a philosophical problem. Moreover, he felt that his father had shown him only one side of the picture.

"Can the problem of terrorism simply be attributed to Pakistan's involvement in the American war against the USSR? Doesn't the problem go deeper? Are the terrorists only villains?" he thought.

"Being a student of philosophy, I need to go beyond popular views to arrive at a profounder appreciation of the problem. This alone will make terrorism a philosophical problem." Accordingly, Ali decided to seek the guidance of his professors and the foremost name that came to his mind was Dr Junaid.

Chapter 24

Dr Junaid acceded to Ali's request and asked him to come to his residence in the evening.

Dr Junaid's spacious house was situated in the centre of the city, not very far from Ali's. The professor was a confirmed bachelor and his only companion in the house was an old family servant. The latter received Ali at the entrance and took him to a compound on the back of the house, where Dr Junaid was reading a newspaper. He warmly received Ali and ordered tea for both.

"You said you wanted to discuss the terrorism issue with me."

"Yes sir. I have to make a presentation before Prof Rameez and the rest of the class next week; so I thought it would be of tremendous help to me if I seek your guidance," Ali replied politely.

"Ok. I'm glad you're coming out of your shell and will help you whatever I can."
"Sir there is a split on the causes of terrorism in our society. One view is that it's the gift of Pakistan's post 9/11 alliance with the USA. The other view is that it is the fruit of our role in America's proxy war against the former USSR in Afghanistan. Where does the truth lie?" Ali enquired.

"The complete truth lies in neither view, though I must say there's an element of truth in both," Dr Junaid began. "Actually we as a nation have the incorrigible habit of ascribing our sins and shortcomings, failures and faults to others. We are wont to believing that America or India or Israel is out to ruin us and fail to see and accept our own faults. Pakistan is not the only ally of America but why is Pakistan facing terrorism in a way no other American ally is doing? Can you answer this question?"

Without waiting for an answer from Ali, Dr Junaid continued: "Whatever your answer, it's clear that if American alliance *per se* — post Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or post 9/11 — was the cause of terrorism, then every American ally would face the same effect, as similar causes tend to produce similar effects. But this is hardly the case. Look at the countries in the Middle East. They are Muslims as well as staunch American allies but they are not facing terrorism, at least not on the scale we are facing. So we'll have to look for the causes elsewhere. Remember the definition of 'cause'— the set of necessary and sufficient conditions to produce an effect. So apply this definition and I'm sure you'll arrive at the answer."

“So it means we may rule out the causal link between terrorism on one hand and being an American ally or being a Muslim state or both on the other,” Ali observed.

“Now you are on the right track my dear student,” Dr Junaid remarked. “Once you have eliminated the wrong links, you can find the right ones.”

“But sir what about being a neighbour of Afghanistan?” Ali asked.

“Iran is also Afghanistan’s neighbour as well as a Muslim state and it doesn’t have these problems,” Dr Junaid replied.

“But sir, with due respect, Iran is not an American ally.”

“Before the Islamic revolution, Iran was the staunchest of US allies,” Dr Junaid returned calmly. “You see, you have assumed for no good reason that the roots of terrorism consist in Pakistan’s foreign policy, in particular its alliance with the US. This is preventing you from looking for the indigenous factors.”

Meanwhile, Dr Junaid’s servant came back with tea and having put the tray on the table went back quietly.

“And what are those indigenous factors?” Ali asked.

“This you’ll have to find out yourself. I’m against spoon feeding. However, I can show you the direction,” Dr Junaid told Ali and then asked, “Have you studied the Pakistan movement?”

“Yes sir, but I’m afraid only in textbooks.”

“Ok. Why do you think Pakistan was created?”

“Sir because the Hindus were deadly against Muslims and Islam and after the British had left India, they would have crushed Muslims politically, economically and culturally. So in order to protect Muslim identity and rights, Pakistan was created.” Ali presented a widely accepted view.

“Let’s admit for the sake of argument that Pakistan was created for the reasons that you have enumerated. However, one thing is clear — that India was bifurcated on the basis of religion. There was no other basis, otherwise East and West Pakistan wouldn’t have merged. Now when you create a state on the basis of religion — in this case Islam whom its adherents claim to be a universal religion which transcends geographic and ethnic boundaries — and

get tremendous popular support for that cause, you are promising a definite shape that the state would take in future. Name a single other Muslim state which was created on the basis of religion."

"I can't recall."

"You can never, because Pakistan is the only Muslim state created on the basis of religion. Now when you establish a state in the name of religion, you make it an ideological entity and in such an entity, the ideology should reign supreme. Now what is Islamic ideology? That Muslims all over the world constitute one nation — the *milat* as it is called — and that the political and economic system of the state would be based on Islamic ideals. Pakistan thus was to be an Islamic state, which should serve as the centre of Muslim unity," Dr Junaid opined.

"But sir if that were the case, then how do you see Mr Jinnah's historic address to the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, where he categorically stated that the state would not discriminate on the basis of religion?" Ali asked.

"Mr Jinnah's statement corroborates rather than contradicts my position. The address in fact was a damage control measure. Mr Jinnah knew well that a state carved out on the basis of Islam should be an Islamic state and being a constitutional expert *par excellence*, he also knew well what an Islamic state should be. So he decided to give a new vision for the new state, which was at variance with the principles which underlay the Pakistan movement and which he himself had championed, Dr Junaid maintained."

"Why did he do that?"

"Do I need to answer? Find an answer yourself. But let's move ahead. The creation of Pakistan created a tension between those who maintained that it should be an Islamic state — we may call them Islamists — and those who were of the view that the state should have nothing to do with religion — likewise we may call them secularists of course for the sake of convenience. This tension persists to date. It is in this tension that you may search the roots of terrorism," Dr Junaid advised Ali.

"I'll do so definitely. But sir why has this tension gone violent? Why is Islam, which is essentially a religion of peace, is being projected as a militant religion, which sanctions, nay encourages bloodshed?"

Dr Junaid took a deep breath and then said: "It's a very pertinent question and to me the key to solving the riddle. Your question warrants a detailed answer.

However, to save our time and to encourage you to think for yourself, I'll be brief. I know it's customary to point the finger at the *madaris*, which allegedly glorify violence in the name of jihad. I'm no defender of *madaris* as an independent system of education. But those who hold the seminaries responsible for violence commit the familiar *post hoc* fallacy. You must be aware that Pakistan is not the only country where seminaries exist. So if *madaris* were the cause of terrorism, it would be a universal problem. In fact in countries like Iran, the impact of *madaris* is much stronger.

"Coming to the secularists-religionists tension, it's not merely a religious issue, it has also strong political and economic dimensions. The establishment of an Islamic system will re-distribute political and economic power, which I'm afraid our elite class — the so-called modernist, liberal, enlightened people — is not willing to accept, because they have high stakes in the preservation of the *status quo*. Who has ruled us since we became independent? Not the clergy but a bunch of feudals and capitalists. So in a nutshell, religious tension is potentially violent, because religion is one thing people are prepared to die for. And when this religious tension has political and economic dimensions as well, violence is likely to erupt."

"Sir last question: Is there a way out? Is making Pakistan an Islamic state the solution to the problem?"

"I doubt it. It's too late to establish an Islamic state now. If an Islamic state is established here, it may be as reactionary as the one established by the Taliban in Afghanistan and will probably meet a similar fate. The solution lies in the real change — in political and economic transformation rather than mere transition. How this change can be effected? Well, think for yourself."

Ali's discussion with Dr Junaid had answered several of his questions but at the same time it raised several new ones. He credited Dr Junaid with showing him another side of terrorism, which traced its roots to as far back as the country's conception. He had now enough material to prepare his presentation and all he had to do was to sift through the material and to come out with a coherent thesis, though he felt that sixty minutes were grossly insufficient to do justice to the topic. He also felt that the problem of terrorism had captured his interest and therefore decided to study it in depth. He also considered whether he should write his thesis on it but couldn't decide and therefore shelved the decision until he was through with the presentation.

While leaving for the university on the day he was to make his presentation, Ali was very tense. He had never made a presentation before and the thought that everyone in the class would be looking at him for one and half an hour was enough to make him jittery. Besides, the topic on which he would be

speaking was a controversial one and his classmates might not agree with him and grill him with their questions. But at the same time, he was confident that he had properly researched the problem and if everything went well he could handle that.

The hour came and after Prof Rameez's introductory remarks, Ali was called to the rostrum. He began nervously and struggled to speak coherently and clearly. He looked at the faces of his classmates and saw lack of interest or disapproval in them. However, he noticed Sara looking at him keenly and sympathetically with a friendly smile, which reassured him and helped him partly get over his nervousness.

However, that wasn't enough and after half an hour he realized that he was getting nowhere. The facts that he had memorized and the arguments that he had constructed seemed to have largely slipped his memory. Clueless and directionless, Ali left the rostrum in grave dejection.

"All right it wasn't a bad presentation considering that it was Ali's first, though I must say it could have been far more focused, coherent and clear," Prof Rameez tried to play down Ali's disappointing performance. "Now Ali will take your questions and comments."

Riaz was the first to raise his hand and after a nod from the professor said," I'm sorry Ali but your presentation has made only one thing clear and that is that you are totally unclear about the problem of terrorism in our country both as to its genesis and its resolution. This was my observation and now my question is whether the real problem that we are facing is not insurgency but state terrorism?"

"The state," Ali replied, "is not killing innocent people. It's the militants who are killing people. So it's not state terrorism."

"But what about drone attacks? Aren't those attacks a manifestation of state terrorism?" Naila asked.

"Drone attacks aren't being carried out by our govt but by the USA," Ali answered.

"Come on; we all know the drone strikes have the consent of our govt," Naila wasn't satisfied with Ali's answer.

"Well, in that case I would say that drones target militants and not civilians," Ali tried to come up with an answer.

“Drones kill innocent people. You can’t deny that,” Zahid remarked.

“I think your friends have a point Ali. Drone strikes are too serious a matter to be dismissed. Anyway, on the whole, it was a nice session and if there’s no other question or comment, we’ll finish here. I’m thankful to you all for your participation,” Prof Rameez made the concluding remarks.

Ali was disappointed with himself for not faring well at the presentation. Sara saw Ali’s dejected face and felt sorry for him. After the class was dismissed, she went to Ali and said to him, “I wouldn’t say it was an excellent presentation but you didn’t cut a sorry figure either.”

“Thanks for the kind words,” Ali replied. “But really I’m crossed with myself for I had prepared hard for the presentation but I just got nervous and my mind went blank.”

“It can happen to anyone. To forget is human. But at the very least, you made an attempt and you can always improve on that. Remember that was your first but not the last presentation. Would you mind if I offered you a drink?”

“Thanks. I’m disturbed but not that much as to reject your offer.”

“Now you’ll have to make your presentation,” Ali said to Sara as they took their seats in a restaurant just outside the university.

“Mine is the last, still two months away. But let’s talk about something else,” Sara said as she wanted Ali to turn his mind away from the presentation. “Now tell me are you interested in mysticism?” she asked an unexpected question.

“Mysticism! Well I read a little bit about that when I was studying English romantic poets. But how come a matter-of-fact girl like you has got anything to do with mysticism?”

“Well a matter-of-fact should above all be an open mind and shouldn’t shun anything unless she has seen through it. I just want to have an insight into mysticism and wonder whether you can guide me,” Sara answered.

“All I know about mysticism,” Ali began,” is that it’s a direct insight into reality. The mystical experience goes beyond the ordinary sense experience and transcends speculative and rational discourse.”

“But this makes mystical experience akin to intuition, because in intuition one

knows something to be true or feels it's going to happen with no rational or empirical justification for the same. Doesn't it?" Sara queried.

"Intuition is a cognitive faculty. Mystical experience doesn't aim at knowledge as such but at transformation. The mystic aspires to become God or God-like," Ali replied.

"Is belief in God necessary for the mystic?"

"I think not. In Buddhism, there is no concept of God at least in the conventional sense of the word. But still a strong current of mysticism runs through Buddhism."

"But then with whom the Buddhist mystic would aspire to become one?" Sara asked.

"With nothingness, I suppose, because in Buddhism, as far as I know, nothingness is the ultimate truth. And this is what Nirvana is — extinction to become one with nothingness. In Islamic terminology, it's called *fana* or annihilation. However, for Muslim mystics, *fana* is just a means to *baqa* — the everlasting life with God or in God depending upon which school one belongs to," Ali explained.

"That's a very concise answer," Sara appreciated. "But tell me how is mystical experience different from religious experience?"

"In my view, religious experience is essentially a feeling of absolute dependence on God, while mystical experience is becoming one with God. One may be religious without being a mystic. But I think one cannot be a mystic without having absolute dependence on God. Though I admit there's a thin line between religious and mystical experiences," Ali explained.

"Great! This is a fine introduction to the subject. I'll browse the net to know more about mysticism and may get back to you. Shall we leave?"

Sara wasn't interested in mysticism but she had read about it here and there and already knew what Ali had told her. She had started the discussion, because she wanted Ali to get over his botched presentation.

Sara's effort wasn't in vain. Ali was able to get over the presentation. But now his mind turned towards mysticism. The very fact that Sara had expressed her interest in mysticism was enough motivation for him to know more about the subject so that he might quench her thirst. The idea that he should write his thesis on mysticism also crossed his mind but then again he couldn't make up

his mind. At any rate, he decided to delve deep into mysticism.

Chapter 25

"You remember the girl who interviewed you some time back on *madaris* education system and of whom you were enamoured?" Dr Junaid asked Maulvi Zia.

"Yes I do and ever since I'm longing to see her again. She had told me she would come back and meet me," Maulvi Zia replied.

"Well. I have news for you. I know who she is but she is certainly not what she told you. She is not a British resident. Nor is she conducting any research on *madaris*," Dr Junaid stunned Zia.

"Oh really! But who is she and how do you know her?"

"Her name is Sara Aqeel. She is the daughter of Seth Nisar — yes our Seth Nisar — and she is my student in the philosophy department."

"Is it!" Zia exclaimed as he sprang up from his chair. How do you know? Are you sure?"

"I got as much surprised as you are now when I came to know of her identity. How did I come to know of that, leave it aside. Yes what I told you is as much indubitable as the fact that you are sitting before me. Rest assured."

"But why is she Sara Aqeel and not Sara Nisar?"

"Actually Aqeel was the name of Seth Nisar's father; so Sara is named after her grand father. If her name were Sara Nisar, I would have recognized her much earlier."

"But does she know that you know her identity?" Maulvi Zia questioned.

"Not yet," Dr Junaid replied.

"And what about Seth Nisar? Is he in the picture?"

"I doubt it. I think he's in the dark about this. Why in the world would Nisar allow her to be here?"

"I agree with you. There can hardly be any reason for Nisar to send his daughter to me with fake identity. But what possible reason she can have for visiting me in such a manner?"

“Well that’s a question only Sara can answer correctly. But, of course, this doesn’t prevent us from conjecturing. Probably she suspected that her father was working for us and she wanted to know why he was doing this and who we really are.”

“This seems quite plausible an explanation. Though it gives rise to some questions but I’ll not go into those. Now tell me whether Sara can become a danger for us and, more important, does she now the link between you and me?” Zia asked.

“To your second question I would say I don’t know. To your first question I doubt it. It’s quite some time since she saw you. Had she wanted to create any problem for us, she would have done so. But she hasn’t.”

“Should we tell Seth Nisar about the adventures of his daughter?”

“Yes we should. We need to caution him. Ask him to come immediately,” Dr Junaid advised his cousin.

“Seth Nisar is abroad these days. He’ll be back at the end of the week. Then I’ll talk to him. But what I’m thinking right now is whether Sara can be part of us.”

“Why? Are you fed up with Rubina?”

“Woman is like a dress,” Maulvi Zia said. “The more you use her, the more worn out she becomes. But if you insist I can wait.”

“You had better be patient. Seth Nisar has been very useful for us and would never allow his daughter to be part of our network.”

“So there’s no way I can have Sara, but why did she stop coming to me? Did she know all she wanted to know?”

“Probably she realized she would be in danger or probably someone else advised her and in that event Sara is not the only one who knows the connection between you and Seth Nisar,” Dr Junaid opined.

“Ok. I think we needn’t worry about that. But we need to inform Seth Nisar as soon as he’s back.”

“Well that takes care of this matter. But now tell me what you wanted to share with me?” Dr Junaid queried.

“Yes let’s get down to the business. The govt has decided to crackdown on the White Mosque. The decision was made at a meeting where the prime minister and the army chief were present,” Maulvi Zia confided.

“How do you know that?”

“Straight from the horse’s mouth. I mean Malik Naseem himself told me. He doesn’t want this operation but his hands are tied.”

“When will the operation be launched?”

“In a fortnight, though Malik himself isn’t aware of the exact date.”

“Do you think that son of a bitch can be trusted?” Dr Junaid asked.

Malik Naseem is the last person on the face of this earth who we should trust. But in this case he’s not lying. My sources in the agencies have also confirmed this. The security forces will enter the mosque in search of arms and militants. The plan is to defame us before the entire world and expose that we have turned Allah’s home into a den of arms and a sanctuary for militants. But God willing, they’ll not succeed in their nefarious designs. I have already asked the mujahideen to leave the mosque and in just few days they all will vacate it so that when the forces enter the mosque, they’ll not find a single bullet or a single mujahid,” Maulvi Zia explained.

“This is a good strategy on the face of it. But again, the leakage of information by Malik Naseem can be a ploy to get the White mosque vacated by the mujahideen without firing a single bullet. There’s a lot of stuff in the media that the White Mosque has become a safe haven for the militants and the govt is facing tremendous pressure to act,” Dr Junaid expressed his view.

“I don’t entirely disagree with you. But we can’t afford any risk. Besides, when the security forces storm our mosque and fail to lay their hands on any militant, that would bring unimaginable shame to the govt. And let me tell you, the mujahideen would never leave the capital. We have many other sanctuaries for them in the city. This is no problem for us. The real problem for us is where to go from here. We had the govt changed and what we considered our own prime minister installed, but we haven’t got anything. There is no let up in the operation against the mujahideen. Drone attacks continue with all their ferocity. The forces are opening another front in Waziristan. We need to find a way out and do so at the earliest. I’m meeting some key militant leaders in few days and we’ll decide the way forward. I need your input.”

"You'll have it," Dr Junaid promised.

"**There are two** tragedies in life: one is not to get your heart's desire, the other is to get it, says a character in Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*. This is also my philosophy of life," Prof Rameez told his students. They were having lunch in a cafeteria outside the campus. Though Rameez had invited the entire class, only Naila, Riaz, Javed and Ali could make it.

"You mean there's no difference between achieving the object of your desire and failing to do that. How come is it possible?" Naila objected. "Besides, if your view is correct, there is nothing to choose between health and sickness, life and death, wealth and poverty, progress and decadence, growth and corruption, rise and fall, ascent and descent, glory and ignominy, pain and pleasure, heaven and hell."

"I once again appreciate your eloquence but you have misunderstood me. I didn't mean that there's nothing to choose between life and death or success and failure. What I meant was that the world of desires is endless in time and space. At a given moment, either you are able to satisfy your desire or you're not. If you don't satisfy your desire, you're disappointed. But if you satisfy it, you face another desire and so on. The result is that the satisfaction of desires, even if you were to travel by the speed of light, is never complete and the inescapable result is disappointment," Prof Rameez explained.

"But does it mean we should suppress our desires?" Ali asked.

"And is it even possible or advisable to do so?" Naila added. She appeared to be stealing the show in the absence of Sara.

"No, I wouldn't maintain this, for it's neither possible nor desirable. In fact, suppression of desires is also a desire. But as Lord Buddha said, we should, and that's very much possible, avoid attachment and antipathy. As far as possible, we should have an indifferent attitude, not towards desires but towards their fulfillment. Though we should prefer health to sickness and success to failure — and we all do so naturally of course —at the same time, we should accept failure and sickness as we would accept success and health. I know developing such attitude is easier said than done, but it's not impossible," Prof Rameez tried to defend his position.

"How successfully have you developed this attitude," a curious Riaz queried.

"Developing such an attitude is a continuous process and without being boastful I would like to say that I'm very much in it," Prof Rameez replied.

In a short span, Naila had developed likeness for Rameez. He was young, handsome and wealthy. She had realized that Rameez was too mature to be taken in by appearances. So she was trying to win him over by her knowledge and intelligence. Naila herself came of a middle class family. Her father was a civil servant, who was due to retire in couple of years.

Naila was the eldest of his three daughters. Like most other middle class girls, her main concern was how to find herself a suitable husband: rich, handsome and educated. Much to her dismay, none of her classmates measured up to that standard. They were all well educated, no doubt, but none of them was rich. Riaz had made some overtures to Naila but the fact that he wasn't wealthy spoiled his chances. The clock was ticking and Naila's disappointment was on the increase. She was pretty and intelligent. But she was painfully aware that none of those qualities was sufficient to find her a good match or even a good job.

The arrival of Prof Rameez re-kindled Naila's hopes. She instantly felt he was the person she was looking for. To impress him, she made it a point to ask probing questions, dominate classroom debates and engage him in discussion inside and outside the class. But so far her efforts had not borne fruit, as the young teacher showed no signs of being responsive to her overtures. He looked upon her only as an inquisitive student, without realizing that her inquisitiveness was a sort of thirst which no amount of intellectual engagement could quench.

Naila was also painfully aware of her inferiority to Sara. So Sara's absence that day was a blessing for her and she decided to parade her knowledge.

"Sir philosophy is a way of life and if a way of life is not practicable for the vast majority of people, is it worthwhile to adopt the same? Besides, avoidance of attachment and antipathy and being cynical towards the satisfaction of one's desires seems to me a skeptical philosophy at best; because, the underlying thought is that there's no reason that we should prefer one course of life to another, one set of values to another and one way of life to another. The inescapable conclusion is that all preferences are prejudices, all choices are biases," Naila maintained.

"Interesting," Prof Rameez admitted. "I'll definitely answer you. But I think we should have our lunch first."

"Sir would we resume our discussion after we have our meal, because I'm desperate to have your answer and then I have questions of my own?" Ali, who was beginning to take interest in the debate, requested much to the

annoyance of Naila. She was interested less in the discussion and more in Rameez and wanted to spend some time with him alone. Before Rameez could answer, Naila told them that she would be leaving after lunch.

"Ok. As I have to answer primarily Naila's questions, I'll defer the discussion until such time as she is available. But I'll definitely take your questions Ali," Prof Rameez said. After lunch, Naila left leaving the four men in the debate mode.

"Sir, of late, I have got interested in mysticism," began Ali. "One common element that I have found among mystics across religions and continents is the belief in an all-pervasive unity embodied in the statement that all is one, that all distinctions including those between God and man and good and evil are at bottom illusory; and therefore the best course for man is to submit to the divine will. How do you see this?"

Prof Rameez drew a deep breath and then said, "Like you, I have also been interested in mysticism but that's a different story. Whatever you have said of mysticism is largely correct. However, there are some schools of mystics, particularly among Muslims, which deny that all distinctions, especially those you referred to, are illusory. Man, the dissenters say, shares many divine attributes but similarity is not identity and man is not God. Just as a droplet has several attributes of the ocean but it's not the ocean itself. So distinctions are there and they are real.

"When we say that good and evil, pleasure and pain, virtue and vice are relative or subjective, it doesn't follow that they are one and the same. Relativity or subjectivity doesn't constitute identity. Mysticism has other attributes like enthroning intuition over reason, resignation over effort, subjectivity over objectivity. It's a complete worldview as opposed to rationalism or empiricism. However, it's not merely a worldview; it's also a way of life. Hence, to me mysticism represents a unique blend of religion and philosophy. This means one cannot be a mystic merely by having a mystical worldview unless one adopts the right way of life."

"But sir is it possible for me to understand mysticism without myself being a mystic?" Ali asked.

"Yes, just as you can appreciate poetry without being a poet yourself."

"But sir poetry isn't a way of life," Ali returned.

"I was coming to that. The mystic worldview can be understood without being a mystic but in order for you to appreciate mystical experience you need to

live it," Prof Rameez explained.

At that moment, he received a call. "I'm afraid gentlemen I need to go back to the department. We'll discuss this issue some other time," Rameez told his students.

Chapter 26

Seth Nisar returned from abroad and was told by his secretary that Mr Rais Ahmad had called him twice during his absence. Rais Ahmad was one of the code names of Maulvi Zia. So Seth Nisar called Zia and was asked to see the latter immediately.

"I suppose you had a successful tour abroad," a grim faced Zia said to Seth Nisar as the latter called on him at his farm house.

"Yes, thanks," Nisar replied briefly.

"You must be wondering why I asked you to see me immediately."

"I guess there's some pressing business."

"Yes it's. Far more pressing than you would imagine," Zia replied. "You have a daughter named Sara I suppose."

"Yes. But what my daughter has to do with the business between us?" a flabbergasted Seth Nisar asked.

"A lot, I'm afraid. She has been spying on you," Zia dropped the bombshell.

"What? My daughter spying on me! I don't believe it," a stunned Nisar remarked.

"You are shocked. But there's much more in store for you." And then Zia told his visitor how Sara met him twice.

"I know it's difficult for you to believe this and I trust you're in no way to be blamed for this. But now that you have come to know of this, you have to keep an eye on your daughter and make sure that our nexus remains a closely guarded affair. We mean no harm to your family as long as no harm comes to us from them." Maulvi Zia warned Seth Nisar.

Seth Nisar was at a loss what to say. He had never imagined that Sara would do things like that. He wanted to speak to her at once. So he sought the permission to leave. However, his main concern was not that Sara had spied on him but her safety. He knew how ferocious those people were and they wouldn't hesitate to kill her if they had to.

When Seth Nisar reached home, Sara was in her study. "We need to talk," he said in a harsh tone as he entered the study. "You have been spying on me and

have been to Maulvi Zia?"

"Oh. So you know it," Sara replied calmly.

"But you don't know how dangerous these people are."

"If these people are so dangerous, why do you work for them?"

"Why I work for them is a long story but you shouldn't have done that."

"I'm sorry but I was concerned about you. You were meeting some odd people and one day I chased you to Maulvi Zia's farm house and was surprised what you had got to do with a person like him. The rest you probably are aware of. But trust me papa, I did this only for you. You would remember that I had asked you several times about that as you seemed to be in some trouble. But you decided not to share anything with me. But papa now you'll have to disclose to me the connection between you and the patron-in-chief of terrorists. Why do you work for such savages?"

"Yes I do work for these people. But I do so against my will and I warn you against them."

"But what makes you work for Zia? I can be of help to you."

"The only way you can help me is to avoid these people. Now tell me who else knows I'm in Zia's league?

"I haven't shared it with any one," Sara lied, because she didn't want to create problems for Ali and his father."

"Ok. From Now on, forget that I have anything to do with Zia or his organization. Just focus on your studies and then get yourself prepared for the real world."

"As you say papa," Sara nodded obediently.

"That's like a good girl."

"But you'll also have to promise that you'll quit the company of Zia as early as possible."

"Sweetheart, I would do so this very moment if I could. But unfortunately, it's easier said than done. Zia's league is like the gates of hell, where you neither enter nor leave of your own accord. Anyway, I'll do my best to find a way

out."

"Papa, please one more time. Tell me what possibly can force as wealthy and as influential a man like you to remain in an evil league against your will?"

"Last time, sweetheart. Yes I have wealth and influence. But with all my assets, I'm helpless." Seth Nisar said in a voice choked with emotions and left the study.

That was too much for Sara. She had never seen her father so helpless. He was known as a dauntless and ruthless business tycoon, who was wooed by top politicians and senior bureaucrats of the country. Not only that, he had global links and was on personal terms with several Congressmen in America. But now that very person was in a mousetrap.

"How powerful Maulvi Zia is that he has brought my father to his knees! But how did he come to know of my identity. Papa has talked to me about that just after his return from abroad. So it all happened during last one week. But who can be the source of this information? Yes, it can be Dr Junaid. Yes the other day, he asked me about my family. Yes, the name of Seth Nisar would have raised alarm bells in him. It means Dr Junaid is also part of the nexus. But why would such an enlightened a person would side with extremists and terrorists?" Maybe, he too was trapped like my father. But the real question before me is how to get papa out of this diabolical league?" Sara's train of thought ran like that.

Prof Rameez's statement that one cannot appreciate mystical experience without going through it made a great impression on Ali. He had turned to mysticism only to impress Sara but gradually his interest in the discipline increased.

"Is it possible to experience the reality directly? Can I become one with God? Can the subject-object, man-God distinction obliterate?"

Such were the questions that agitated his mind. Ali had realized that answer to those questions couldn't be given by speculation. He had to undergo the necessary experience to answer them. Already, the study of anti-rationalists like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Bergson had brought home to him the limits of reason and strengthened his trust in intuition.

"Reason can't resolve metaphysical problems. It begets only doubts, which it can never go beyond. The one who places trust in reason is lost in the labyrinth of skepticism. Life can be understood not by speculation but by living it," he thought.

Ali felt that mysticism could help resolve his conflicts and doubts. But the problem before him was how to get himself initiated into that cult. He needed a *guru* to guide him but he was too impatient and too shy to search for the one. So he decided to be his own guide. He borrowed couple of books on mysticism from the library and impatiently skimmed through the pages.

"Mysticism above all," he concluded, "is absolute trust in and submission to the will of God. While a religious person lives and dies for God, the mystic lives and dies in God. For the mystic nothing exists but God. He thinks only of God, feels only the presence of God and sees only God. If I want to embark on the course of mysticism, I must first of all repose full trust in, and resign to, the divine will. I should do nothing of my own accord and submit entirely to the will of God wherever it leads me to," Ali resolved.

Chapter 27

Formally Maulvi Zia was still a bachelor. The reason was that he had never felt a passion for any woman beyond sexual attraction. But Sara had come to her as an exception and he had stuck on her and wanted to possess her. Many a time when he was in bed with Rubina, he would call her Sara in the moment of ecstasy — much to the annoyance of that poor mistress.

On that evening, Zia summoned Seth Nisar and said to him, "Seth sahib, you are the luckiest person on the face of this earth."

"I'm? How? A bewildered Seth Nisar asked.

"Because I have chosen your daughter to be my bride. I hope it's wonderful news for you," Maulvi Zia said with a devilish smile.

"Look Maulvi sahib, ever since I joined you, I have complied with your each and every order and put all my resources at your disposal. But what you have just said is impossible for me to tolerate. How could you come up with such a nasty proposal?" An exasperated Nisar said.

"Why? Am I not rich and powerful? I may be a bit older but that's normal in our society. Men ought to be more mature than their wives so that they could lead and guide them."

"Zia sahib it's not your age; it's just what you are. My daughter wouldn't consent to that."

"If I have your consent, then it's not much difficult to have hers."

"I can never give you my consent either. It's not a question of my wealth and influence; it's the question of my daughter — my life, my heart and soul."

"You have already sold your soul to me. As for your life, I can take it whenever I want. On one occasion in the past you had refused to play ball with me and I need not remind you what happened afterward. So please don't make me get tough on you. Your daughter I must say is a princess and I'll make her a queen. But if you persist, I'll make her my concubine. I'll not leave her in a position where any honorable person would be willing to marry her. So better behave like a good old man. I give you two weeks to decide and convey me your consent."

Seth Nisar was a man of strong nerves but Maulvi Zia's tone and words were

enough to shatter him. He knew well what Zia was capable of doing. Since it was the question of the life of his beloved daughter, he decided not to give in. He couldn't report the matter to the police because that would also expose him without guaranteeing Sara's safety. One option he thought was to send Sara abroad immediately. He could settle her anywhere in the world. He realized that the time had come to tell Sara the truth.

When Seth Nisar reached home, it was dinner time and Sara was waiting for him. At the dining table, Sara at once noticed there was something terribly wrong with her father. He was sitting with his head down completely silent and motionless.

"Papa you don't seem to be ok."

Seth Nisar didn't reply. Sara rose from the chair and went to her father.

"You look very upset. Has it something to do with Maulvi Zia?" she asked.

Seth Nisar realizing it was time he must speak said, "Come dear we have some crucial things to talk about."

Sara followed Nisar to his bedroom. Seth Nisar shut the door and began, "Sara my daughter what I'm going to say you should listen to with utmost fortitude."

"Yes papa I'm all ears."

"I have just come from Maulvi Zia, who has made an obnoxious proposal, which I wouldn't entertain come what may, even if it costs me my life." Nisar paused for a moment to catch his breath and then dropped the bombshell, "He wants to marry you."

"What! How could he say such a thing?"

Seth Nisar gave an account of what went between him and Zia.

"So what do you say?" Sara asked when Nisar had finished.

"I'll never let that happen. Nothing is dearer to me than you. I can report the matter to the police but that wouldn't solve the problem. Zia would deny that he ever made such threats and I can never prove that. Besides, it would give rise to questions about the connection between me and Zia. I care the least about myself but I don't want you to be in the news. My greatest fear is that even if Zia is put behind bars, he can cause you incalculable harm through his

network. The only way I can ensure your safety is to send you abroad and that too immediately. You can get yourself enrolled in some university and resume your studies. I curse the time when I joined Maulvi Zia. But trust me honey never in my wildest of imaginations it had occurred to me that things would boil down to your life."

"Papa please don't upbraid yourself. What's done is done. Maulvi Zia may be a lethal person but I'm not afraid of him and I'm not going to leave you or the country. I'll definitely go abroad for advanced studies but in due course and not out of fear of Zia," Sara expressed her resolve.

"I know you're courageous but courage has to be combined with prudence and prudence demands that we should make ourselves secure. If you go abroad, it will not be an act of cowardice but of prudence. Retreat is not surrender. So please do as I say." Seth Nisar implored his daughter.

"Papa I understand that but I don't want to make myself secure at your expense. More than anything else, I owe a duty to you."

"The best way you can fulfill your duty to me is to pay heed to my advice."

Silence ensued for a few minutes.

"Papa there's another way out. What if I marry someone else? You can always tell Zia that you tried your best to persuade me but I married of my own accord," Sara proposed a way out.

"I don't know whether it can work. Whom would you marry in such a short time? Of course, I can't let you marry any Tom, Dick and Harry. Nor would you do so I trust. He must have at least some measure of compatibility with you. We don't have the time to find a suitable match for you."

"We don't have to find one. I have already one in my mind."

"Who's that?"

"His name is Ali Naqvi. He is my classmate."

"What about his family?"

"He comes of a middle class family. His father is a journalist, his mother teaches in a college. They are a nice family."
"Oh I hate these nice middle class people!"

“I too but he’s our best bet in these circumstances.”

“But is he willing to marry you and in these circumstances?”

“I have never talked to him about that or even dropped a hint. But I feel it in my bones that he would agree,” Sara replied.

“And his family?” Nisar asked. “These middle class people can’t take any major decision without the consent of their elders.”

“Well, I have met his parents and I believe they’ll have no objection.”

“Ok, but I need some time to think.”

“Papa we are racing against time. In normal circumstances, I would hardly have chosen Ali as he’s no match for me but in the present situation he is the best available option. Should we have dinner now?”

At dinner Seth Nisar kept asking Sara about Ali and his family. She told him whatever she knew about them. Sara noticed that her father was now visibly relieved. And that was enough for her to feel that she had made the right decision.

“One thing: We’ll have to tell Ali’s family why we want this marriage to take place in such haste,” Nisar said.

“I think we should tell them the truth but not the whole truth,” Sara opined.

“But should we make the connection between me and Zia known?”

“They already know this,” Sara disclosed and then narrated to her father how she had shared that with Ali and his father.

“I’m sorry papa but I had to do that.”

“It’s all right. One last question: would Ali consent to live with us?”

“I think we shouldn’t make this an issue. If he agrees, well and good. If he doesn’t, I’ll move to his apartment and then return after some time.”

Seth Nisar retired to his room. Sara rang up Ali and said to him straightaway, “Ali, would you marry me? If your answer is in the affirmative, then tomorrow instead of going to the university, come to my place. Before Ali could respond, Sara rang him off and shut down the cell phone.

Sara's call took Ali by surprise. Although marrying Sara was his most cherished dream, the same would come true so suddenly and so early was beyond his wildest of imaginations. For a moment, he thought that was also a dream but then realized it was a fact.

"But how has my dream come true? Maybe it is the result of my trust in God. As the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu says: 'Leave yourself to the will of God and everything will be done for you'. Yes, God has rewarded me with the best that I can have."

But shortly his skepticism started overpowering him. "Why Sara, who has never made any profession of love to me, has offered me marriage and in such a strange manner? Does she have the consent of her father? And what about my parents? I need to take them on board and they will ask me similar questions. I think I had better give Sara a call and seek an explanation. What if she is just kidding with me? No, I know her too well. She is not that sort of a person. She wouldn't make such a proposal if she didn't mean it."

Ali tried to contact Sara but couldn't reach her. "Probably she knew I would pose her such questions and she wants to ascertain whether I truly love her; for if I truly love her, I'll just jump at the proposal without going into whys and what's. Since I'm in love with Sara, I should only accept her proposal without probing its possible reasons," Ali concluded.

"**I know you** would come," Sara said to Ali as he called on her.
She was looking pretty in blue jeans and a white T-shirt. Before Ali could speak, she softly pressed his hand and said in a sweet voice, "I know you have many questions and I'll answer each of them but first I want you to meet my father."

Ali could see a lot of love in her eyes for him. That was enough to convince him that he had made the right decision.

Sara introduced Ali to Seth Nisar, who cast a long glance at the young man.

"Nice to see you," Nisar said in a rather cold voice as he held his hand out to Ali.

The two talked for a few minutes mostly about Ali's family.

"I believe you'll keep my daughter happy and give us no cause for regretting

our decision," Seth Nisar winded up the conversation. "I'm afraid, I have to leave for the office."

After Seth Nisar had gone, Sara took Ali to her bed-room. It was large and delicately furnished. On the walls hanged several of Sara's photographs from her childhood to the present. On the bedside table was placed a photograph of a beautiful woman, in her late 30s, with sharp features. Ali at once noticed a striking resemblance between that woman and Sara.

"This is my mother; two years before she passed away," Sara told Ali.

"She's just like you," Ali remarked. "But it's unfortunate she died so young."

"Yes, papa says I take after mama. She died of cancer."

"Oh I'm sorry."

"Let's forget the past and talk about the present and of course the future," Sara said and took Ali in her arms. "Oh Ali how deeply I love you!" she exclaimed.

At that moment Ali found himself in the seventh heaven. He seemed to have forgotten everything except Sara. All his doubts and questions left him and he was in a state of perfect ecstasy.

"This is the happiest moment of my life," Sara remarked and tightened her embrace. Ali had similar feelings but he was speechless. Several times before he had fanaticized himself to be in such a situation and now that his fantasy had become an actuality, he was beside himself. He wanted to go ahead and kiss Sara but his natural shyness prevented him from doing so.

After some time Sara withdrew herself and took a few steps back. Silence ensued for a while during which Ali stood motionless with his eyes cast down, while Sara kept smiling.

"You're shier than I had supposed," she remarked coquettishly, "but don't worry I'll help you get over your inhibitions. However, for now we had better get down to business. You must be wondering why I made that proposal in such odd a manner. Here I'm to explain that and answer any questions that you may have. But first let me hear your reply."

"I would only say that you have done me a great honor by choosing me to be your life partner," Ali conveyed his consent.

“Thanks a lot. And you have the consent of your parents?” a tickled pink Sara queried.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t talk to them. They even don’t know I’m here. But don’t worry I’ll speak to them today and solicit their consent,” Ali assured her. “One thing I want to say is that it’s enough for me that you have proposed to me. Why you have proposed is not that important for me. However, my parents may want to know the reasons.”

“Yes, I can understand and it’s equally important for you as well. We are going to start a new life and it’s important there are no secrets between us. Transparency is the key to trust.”

Sara paused for a moment and then resumed, “I must say it all happened all of a sudden. We are friends. In fact, you’re the only friend that I have had. But I don’t know when that friendship graduated into love. I have read somewhere that sometimes there’s a lag between being in love and being aware that you’re in love. The same has happened to me. I don’t know since when I’m in love with you but it’s of late that I began to realize that. I wanted to share that feeling with you but I was waiting for an opportune time. But luckily I didn’t have to wait long.

“Only a few days back,” Sara continued, “papa told me that he wanted me to get married. You’ll laugh but my father is a bit superstitious. He has strong faith in astrology and has taken most important decisions of his life on the advice of his astrologer. When superstitions work, as in case of papa, they become sacrosanct and it’s hard to get rid of them. His astrologer has told him that I should get married and do so soon. Papa conveyed to me the astrologer’s advice with the request that I should honor the same. I myself don’t believe in such things but it’s important for me that papa does and I respect his views. If papa had ordered me to get married, I wouldn’t have done so. But the fact is that he implored me and then it wasn’t possible for me to refuse him. So I agreed to honor his wish but on the condition that I’ll marry the man of my choice, the man I love, who of course is you. So this sweetheart is the story,” Sara concluded and got closer to Ali.

Ali, who was patiently hearing Sara’s account, remained silent for a few seconds perhaps trying to understand it and then asked Sara, “And how much time has your father’s astrologer given for the marriage?”

“Don’t be upset. It’s only a week from today.”

“Oh really! It’s a very short time.”

“I’m afraid it is. But it’s all that we have,” Sara replied with a shrug of the shoulders.

“But Sara how is this possible? I mean we’re still students. We’re still to enter into practical life and make a living. If we get married now, how are we going to attend to our studies and how we are to pull ourselves together?” Ali put some logical questions.

“What you have pointed out is correct,” Sara said looking deep into Ali. “I’ll not dispute it. If I had my way, I wouldn’t get married until we were settled. But sometimes, we have to say good-bye to our plans and enter an un-chartered territory, which of course is difficult. But if we’re together and have faith in each other, there’s no problem that we cannot surmount,” Sara said and pressed Ali’s hand warmly.

“Your hand is cold as ice. Are you ok?” she asked.

“Yes I’m,” Ali replied in a feeble voice.

“No, you’re shivering. I fetch coffee for you.”

In a few minutes, Sara returned with coffee and sandwiches. “Please relax,” she advised Ali.

Sara remained silent until Ali finished his coffee.

“How are you feeling now?” she asked Ali.

“I feel better now.”

“Look dear, I don’t want to force my will on you. If you can’t bring yourself to marrying me in such short a period, I’ll respect your decision and we’ll remain friends as now,” Sara told Ali.

“No it’s not that. Marrying you will be the best decision of my life and I’m willing to marry you whenever and wherever you want,” Ali made a categorical reply.

“That’s nice,” Sara said and kissed Ali gently. “But we should leave it to our parents to decide the exact date. Could you request your parents to meet papa at dinner this evening? I trust you’ll be able to persuade them.”

Ali had a hard task convincing his parents. They weren’t opposed to his marrying Sara but they had reservations that the marriage should take place

immediately. However, eventually they gave in and agreed to meet Seth Nisar to finalize marriage matters.

Chapter 28

On the insistence of Seth Nisar, the wedding was held in a simple manner. Though he had given his consent to the marriage, the seth had serious doubts whether it would work. For one thing, he didn't like Ali and his family for their middle class background. He had an inherent dislike of the middle class, which he thought was untrustworthy, greedy and malicious. The quick way in which Ali's family had acceded to the proposal strengthened his suspicion that they were interested in his wealth. If he had his way, he would have married Sara in a compatible family.

However, more than that Seth Nisar was apprehensive of the possible reaction of Maulvi Zia. He didn't share his daughter's optimism that the maulvi would reconcile to her marriage. He had also requested Sara to go abroad immediately after the wedding with Ali on honeymoon as it was customary for wealthy people. But he failed to get Sara's assent, who insisted that she would stay at home and face the consequences of her decision. "One can't escape one's choices; so one had better face them," Sara told him.
Contrary to what she had professed to Ali, Sara had no love for him. She looked upon him at best as a friend. Being a matter of fact, she was free from any romantic notions about friendship. Hence, the marriage with Ali was thus no more than a marriage of convenience for her. She knew it wouldn't be a permanent relationship and would work only as long as she needed it.

Sara had also decided that she wouldn't bear Ali any child, because that might become an obstacle in case she decided to ditch him. It's not that she disliked Ali. He was gentle, well mannered, well bread and well read — the virtues which Sara appreciated. She knew he wasn't greedy at all and had accepted her hand only out of love for her. But she also knew he was greatly impressed by her wealth, beauty and style and would always remain in thrall of her. Most of the women would like to have such husbands. But Sara wasn't an ordinary folk. She wanted to marry a person who could match her wealth, fortune and way of life. And Ali of course was well short on those virtues.

For Ali, things were happening all too quickly to understand them. He was naïve enough to blindly believe what Sara had told him. Though otherwise prone to questioning and analysis, it never occurred to him to ponder why a girl like Sara was so keen to marry him. Though not a romantic by temperament, who had rejected Farzana's advances, he had meekly capitulated to the charms of Sara.

Ali was a person who had always serious thoughts of the morrow. He was always concerned about his future and career. He had decided not to get

married or even fall in the trap of a woman until he was well established. But in case of Sara, all his concerns seemed to have withered away.

Mr Naqvi was not at ease in the whole episode. “There’s something wrong somewhere,” he had told his wife and son. He had seen cases in which couples belonging to different classes had got married. His own marriage was a case in point, as his wife had married him in the face of opposition from her parents. Therefore, he saw no problem in an enormously wealthy girl marrying his son. But he was uncomfortable that everything was happening in such a haste and in such a hush-hush manner.

At any rate, he wasn’t willing to buy the story that all that was being done on the advice of Seth Nisar’s astrologer. “How can a man in Seth Nisar’s position be so much in thrall of a soothsayer that he had agreed to marry his only daughter in a week time?” Mr Naqvi had asked his wife and Ali.

Mr Naqvi was also aware of the connection between Seth Nisar and Maulvi Zia. But despite that he couldn’t even remotely guess that the maulvi was the cause of Sara’s hasty marriage.

Mrs Naqvi also shared her husband’s skepticism but like him she failed to come up with a plausible explanation. She knew Ali was in love with Sara and she also knew well the power of love. Therefore, she persuaded her husband to give his consent to Ali’s wish as she had felt that her son would marry in spite of their opposition, as she had done some twenty-five years ago. “Let’s not make the same mistake that my father made,” she had advised her husband.

The person who was most upset at the Ali-Sara marriage was that poor girl named Farzana. Despite Ali’s coldness and at times arrogance, she had retained indubitable faith in the power of love and had always believed that one day he would reciprocate her feelings. But when Mrs Naqvi broke her the news of Ali’s marriage, she was simply shocked and shaken.

On the day Sara’s wedding took place, the security forces raided the Jamia Islamia and the farm house of Maulvi Zia to arrest him. But Zia had been tipped off well in time by his friends and well wishers in high places. So he slipped and went into hiding.

It was also decided by the government to raid the White Mosque on the suspicion that its premises had become a safe haven for foreign militants. However, at the eleventh hour, the decision was withdrawn and this was done for two reasons: It was feared that the security forces storming a mosque

would cause commotion in the country. However, the major reason was the reports that the militants had vacated the mosque. So in any event, it was considered useless to raid the mosque.

It was also confirmed that Maulvi Zia was not in the White Mosque and that he was still in his home town. But where? No one knew. The failure to nab Zia together with the leakage of the decision to raid the White Mosque exasperated the military establishment, which suspected that someone holding a very important position in the government had spilled the beans. Fingers were also pointed at the person of the prime minister, whose links with Maulvi Zia were well known.

"I have some other news which may be of interest to you," Dr Junaid said to Maulvi Zia when he was about to leave after meeting him in his hideout.

"Yes what's that?"

"Seth Nisar's daughter Sara has got married?"

"With whom? When? How do you know?"

"The marriage took place last evening. The man she has married is a classmate of her, one of my students," Dr Junaid replied?

"Were you present in the wedding?"

"No I wasn't invited. I was told by one of the students; even he wasn't invited. But what I don't understand is why did Sara suddenly decide to get married and that too in such a secretive manner that none from the class or the faculty was invited?"

"Probably I can account for that," Zia said.

"You know the reason?"

"I'm the reason, if I'm not mistaken. I told Nisar that I wanted to marry his daughter and gave him two weeks for his reply, which of course had to be in the affirmative."

"So that's why it happened," Dr Junaid observed. But you didn't tell me anything?"

"I'm sorry I couldn't. But if Seth Nisar thought he could get away from me in that manner, then he is grossly mistaken. However, since I'm under a cloud

these days and still need Nisar's wealth and connections, let him think so. You know I don't believe in forgiveness and I'll take the seth to the task for his disobedience. But for the time being let them enjoy. And of course, I'll send the couple my greetings."

"You do what you want to do; I'll just advise you to be patient. The time is out of joint for us."

"Don't worry; I'll not act in haste," Maulvi Zia assured his friend. "Tell me about Sara's husband. He must be familiar to you."

"His name is Ali, a typical middle class chap — mild and bookish, coward and hardworking. His father is a well-known journalist Hassan Naqvi," Dr Junaid replied.

"Ah Hassan Naqvi! I know him well. He has interviewed me on several occasions. As far as I know, he is an upright person. How did he agree to marry his son to the daughter of Seth Nisar and in so short a period? Were the two in love?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. However, I can confirm that Ali was Sara's only friend in the university."

"I haven't seen Ali but I guess it'll be difficult for any young man to resist the temptation of falling for Sara. She is really a bewitching beauty. Good luck to him, should I say?" Maulvi Zia remarked and then broke into laughter.

Sara was looking strikingly beautiful in her expensive bridal dress. After the wedding ceremony was over, she moved to Ali's house in keeping with the social conventions. Mrs Naqvi had prepared Ali's small bed room for the nuptial night.

At the wedding party, Seth Nisar gave a cheque of ten million rupees to the new couple as what he called 'a small gift from a loving father' and also told Ali's parents that whatever he had was now for his daughter and son-in-law and that he wanted them to join his business after they had completed their studies.

It was late at night when Ali entered his room, where Sara was waiting for him. The moment which he had fantasized for umpteen times had finally arrived. But he was nervous and his heart was beating at a fast pace. When he stepped in, he saw to his surprise that Sara had taken off her bridal dress and

was wearing trousers and a T-shirt.

“So we’re together,” Sara remarked when she saw Ali.

“Yes it’s the happiest moment of my life,” Ali said as if he was in ecstasy and looked at Sara from top to bottom.

“I hope you don’t mind that I have taken off the bridal dress; it was too heavy for me.”

Never mind,” Ali replied.

“Ali we have started our new life and will shortly be entering into a new relationship. But before we start, there are a few things that I want to make clear,” Sara said in a crisp tone.

“Yes please.”

“Papa has given us a hefty amount and told us that we should have no thoughts for the morrow. But you would appreciate that we should try to stand on our own feet and make an independent living. Therefore, until we complete our studies and embark on a career, we’re not going to have a child. Do you agree?”

“Yes I do. We’ll have enough time to bear children,” Ali assented. “Anything else?’

“As you know, I value independence more than anything else. So I expect you to respect my independence and don’t try to impose your will on me like a traditional husband. I assure you that I’ll respect yours,” Sara told Ali.

“I love you Sara and respect whatever you value. So rest assured.”

“There’s one last thing.”

“Yes what is it?” Ali asked.

“I’m all yours,” Sara said in a sweet voice enough to drive Ali crazy.

Book 3

Chapter 29

"Sir please have a seat; I'll just tell madam about your arrival," said a maid servant to Ali.

As he sat on the sofa in the spacious drawing room, Ali recalled that six months ago he was sitting in the same place desperate to tell Sara that he was willing to marry her. And then the six months of his marriage flashed in Ali's memory. How much things had changed during that period. He recalled how he was taken by surprise when Sara had proposed to him; how difficult it was for him to solicit the consent of his parents to the marriage. He also recalled how hectically they had made wedding arrangements, how choosy Sara was in selecting the wedding dress for him and had told him that for her he was the special person therefore she must find a special dress for him.

Then Ali recalled his first night with Sara. How shy and shaky he was and by contrast how bold and confident she was. Then the train back to the past moved ahead and he remembered rather painfully how things started to go wrong between them: just a week after the wedding she had complained to him that it was impossible for her to stay in his 'dungeon' and then she moved back to her native home. Thenceforth, she would ignore him in the university and at times also insult him before the rest of the class.

Ali's travel back to the past was cut short by the arrival of Sara. "So you're here," she remarked. "I appreciate your punctuality."

"You said there was some important matter you wanted to talk about," Ali queried as he rose as a mark of courtesy."

"Yes I'll come to that shortly. Do you want to have anything?"

Ali replied with a shake of the head. "Is uncle Nisar at home?" he asked.

"Yes he is but he's too busy to see you," Sara replied.

"Ok, pay him my regards. I haven't seen him for quite some time. I trust he is all right."

"Yes he's ok. Don't worry on his account," Sara replied in a cold voice. "Let's get down to business. I'll be brief and to the point. I want you to divorce me."

“What!” A startled Ali exclaimed. “Are you serious?”

“How could you ask such a question? It’s too important a matter for me to be non-serious. Our marriage isn’t getting anywhere. So the sooner it’s dissolved, the better it’ll be for both of us,” Sara responded.

“Yes you’re right. Our marriage isn’t getting anywhere. But instead of dissolving it, we should sit together and try to give it some direction,” Ali suggested.

“It can have only one direction and that’s termination,” Sara remarked rather contemptuously.

“I confess a lot of misunderstanding has crept up between us. But Sara we love each other and where there’s love there’s a will and where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

“Oh love! It’s the most ridiculous of all notions. Most of the stupidest things are done in the name of love. At any rate, let me make it clear once and for all that I never had the slightest of love for you. Our marriage was simply a marriage of convenience; otherwise why a girl of my position and wealth should marry a good-for-nothing moron like you? But now I don’t need the tag of marriage. I want to be free as wind. In any event, I’ll be going abroad for doctorate in few months and I see no point in clinging to this meaningless relationship. Of course, I can go to the court and seek an injunction for divorce. But I don’t want to get myself embroiled in judicial matters and I suppose you also don’t want this. So please do as I say. Of course if you want to fix a price for the divorce, you can ask for that,” Sara was as blunt as it could get.

Ali was shocked and shaken to hear Sara’s stark words and revelation. He was well aware that Sara’s warmth towards him had fizzled out but he had never for a moment suspected that Sara had never been in love with him and that she had used him merely as a pawn.

On the wedding night, Ali had promised to respect Sara’s independence and he had fully honored his word. He had never tried to impose his will on her in any matter. He accepted and appreciated Sara’s decision to leave his home. He had always suspected there was some misunderstanding between the two, which he believed would eventually be removed. However, Sara’s bluntness had eroded his optimism and made him come to the painful realization that there was nothing to hold them together. Ali had never been interested in Sara’s wealth and had accepted her hand only out of love. So he told Sara that he would divorce her at the earliest.

“Ok. If I don’t receive divorce papers in a fortnight, I’ll see you in the court.” That was Sara’s final word.

Ali left Sara’s house like a gambler who had lost everything on a single bet and returned home with the heaviest of hearts. Sara had not only shunned him but also dismantled the world of trust that he had constructed with enormous difficulty.

“Why has she used me like a tissue paper? Were all her professions of love no more than a hoax? I have been fair to everyone in my dealings. I never loved Farzana but I never professed my love to her. But why Sara did this to me? I accepted whatever she desired. I always bowed to her will. My relationship with Sara is a classic case of the dichotomy between appearance and reality. Things aren’t what they appear. What appears to be love is in reality self-interest. But the question is who to trust and who to suspect? Who to embrace and who to shun? Perhaps no one is worthy of trust.”

Ali was overwhelmed by such defeatist and skeptical thoughts. In fact, his skepticism had returned with a vengeance.
Mrs Naqvi knew that Ali had gone to meet Sara and therefore was anxiously waiting for him. When Ali got back, his pale face made her suspect something was terribly wrong with him. She had been quietly watching all that he had been going through and felt extremely sorry for him. During the few weeks that Sara had lived with them, Mrs Naqvi had realized the great gulf that existed between their tastes and ways of life. She was therefore hardly surprised when Sara told her she was going back to her father’s house. “Pardon me, I have nothing against you or uncle Naqvi. But it’s not possible for me to live here anymore. I feel suffocated in this dungeon,” Sara had told her.

“Sara whether you live here or anywhere else it’s for you to decide and we’ll respect your decision whatever it is. But were you not aware at the time of the marriage that we’re people of modest means and have nothing to match your father’s wealth?”

This is how Mrs Naqvi had reacted. There was no reply from Sara and that was the last encounter between the two as that very evening Sara left the house.

Mrs Naqvi was still unable to figure out why Sara with full knowledge of and contempt for their situation had chosen to marry Ali. She wasn’t ready to buy Ali’s argument that Sara did that because she loved him.

"If she loved you, she wouldn't leave you for a more comfortable life or for anything else. If you love someone, you leave the world for them rather than leave them for the world. I loved your father and I left even my parents for him. So don't tell me that Sara loves you," she had told Ali, who, however, insisted that Sara loved him and she needed time to adjust to their way of life.

"What's it my son? You look terribly upset," Mrs Naqvi asked Ali.

Ali, who on his way back from Sara's home had vowed that he wouldn't tell anything to his parents, couldn't restrain himself and gave a full account of what had happened between him and Sara earlier that evening.

"So that's what she told you. That girl is so selfish and crafty I had never thought. But did she share with you the precise reason which drove her to marry you?"

"No. Nor did I ask," Ali replied.

"Ok. Even if we knew the reason, it would be of no use to us. Anyhow my son you have made the right decision. If she wants divorce, so be it. There's no point in whipping up a dead horse. Start a new life. Concentrate on your studies and make your career. I understand you have been through a terrible experience and you'll take a lot of time to recover. But remember painful experience is its own reward; it teaches you like nothing else. I'm sure you'll emerge from this experience stronger and wiser. For now, let's have a cup of tea. I have prepared your favorite carrot *halwa*."

"Mother thanks for trying to heal my wounds. You're right; I should try to get over this. It's not the end of the world. But one thing I don't understand. Why has Sara been unfair to me when I haven't been unfair to her or anyone else?" Ali asked.

"I don't know. I'm not a moralist. But my father once told me that this world is governed not by moral laws but by physical laws. Hence, only the physical consequences of our actions appear. So it's not necessary that virtue is rewarded and vice punished. You must have noticed that many a wicked person scales glories, while many a virtuous person is humiliated. By the same token, it's not necessary that love or good-will is requited." Mrs Naqvi furnished an explanation.

Do you believe this?" Ali queried.

"I don't know. As I said, I'm not a moralist," she replied and hurried towards the kitchen.

"**Here are the** divorce papers. You have got what you wanted. But do you have any qualms about the way you used my son," Mrs Naqvi complained to Sara as she gave her the documents indicating that Ali had divorced Sara.

Mr Naqvi was of the view that they should courier the papers to Sara but his wife insisted that she would herself take the papers to Sara, because she wanted to speak to her for the last time.

"Why should I have any qualms? What wrong have I done? I just used my intelligence to get out of a difficult situation. I should be praised rather than condemned for intelligent action," Sara replied with the coldness and arrogance that was characteristic of her.

"You deceived my son; it's not intelligence, it's duplicity."

Sara broke into laughter and then said: "If I deceived your son, then you should also admit that he let himself be deceived or should I say that he wanted to be deceived? Ali did exactly what I expected him to do; I did what he didn't expect of me. It's as simple as that. But if I was justified in my expectations, if I judged Ali correctly and if his expectations were misplaced and he made a blunder of judgment, then who is to be blamed? I? Who was always right? Or he? Who was always wrong? I think nothing can be more unjust than to find fault with a person for her intelligent behavior and sound judgment. If you can't help reproaching someone, then put your son in the dock and vent your venom on him for his foolishness and unsound judgment. Did it ever occur to him why a girl of my standing and wealth would offer her hand to a pauper like him and insist on completing the process in an instant? A person of average intelligence would have suspected there might be something wrong at the bottom. But he never did."

"This is because he loved you."

"If he loved me, it's none of my faults. I never asked him to love me. At any rate, one's emotions shouldn't cloud one's judgment. But I don't think Ali has been only a loser in this game. I think he has got quite a few things to boast of for the rest of his life. First of all, he married an upper class girl, which is a cherished dream of all middle class boys. He got the opportunity to enjoy my company and have sex with me, while I know hundreds of men who would give their life just to spend a few minutes with me. Though only for few months, I gave him the pleasure of believing that I loved him and that I would die without him. I doubt he would ever have that privilege again. If anything, you should be thankful to me for all that instead of upbraiding me. And dear ex-mother-in-law, you also have played an important role in the whole drama.

You're older, more educated and more experienced than I am. But strangely enough, even you or your husband didn't have the slightest of suspicions that ours was only a marriage of convenience. Or probably you had your eyes on my wealth. If your son was deceived by love, you were duped by avarice. Poor family!" Sara finished.

"Sara, you're a winner and we're losers. And being a winner, you can say whatever you want. I had thought you had some remorse at your behavior but I was grossly mistaken. You have no guilt but pride at having, should I say in your language, outclassed and outsmarted us? But remember one day you would regret what you did to Ali. In the entire world none loved you more than he. You were fortunate to have him but you're unfortunate to have lost him. Good evening and enjoy your success," Mrs Naqvi said and left with heavy steps without waiting for Sara's answer.

Chapter 30

Ali's abortive relationship with Sara had shattered him. His parents had advised him to try and forget that experience, concentrate on his studies, avoid excessive thinking and take things as they came. Though difficult, it wasn't an impossible task but it required a man of strong nerves and will or strong faith. And Ali had neither.

Instead, he was a man of feeble will and weak nerves. Though he tried to be strong, at heart he remained a coward. By nature, he was withdrawn, shy, prone to anxiety and afraid of facing people. A man needs to have strong faith either in himself or in God to face the world bravely; but to his grave misfortune, Ali had neither.

He had always been devoid of self-confidence. Faith in God might have made amends for lack of self confidence. But the study of philosophy had deprived him of that faith and turned him into a skeptic, not of a robust variety but of a pessimistic type. Whether thought or matter was real, whether reason or intuition was the reliable guide to action, whether truth consisted in being useful or being consistent with the facts, whether man was free or subject to the inexorable law of causation. He wasn't sure.

Ali oscillated between conflicting philosophies and views: idealism and materialism, rationalism and intuitionism, pragmatism and existentialism, determinism and indeterminism. When he read one system of philosophy, he found it to be the correct and convincing worldview. But when he passed on to another, he found it to be equally correct and convincing — and so on. The result was that he always found himself caught between opposing worldviews. In the morning, he was an idealist but in the afternoon he would become a materialist. At one moment, he had indubitable belief in God; at another he was doubtful whether God existed.

After Sara had ditched him, his intellectual skepticism was reinforced by emotional skepticism. If previously he wasn't sure which philosopher to believe, now he was uncertain which person to trust. Every notion and every idea, every gesture and every word seemed to him to be hollow — no more than an appearance concealing the reality, which he didn't know what it was. For him therefore only appearance existed and all appearance he believed was dubious. Intellectually and emotionally, he was living in a highly uncertain and incredible world without having the nerves to cope with such a world. He would distrust everyone including his parents. At times, he would even suspect that the tea that his mother made for him was poisonous.

Ali had no control over his thoughts, which were as disorderly as a river in high flood. He virtually lost the ability of premeditated action and would most of the time act and speak on the spur of the moment. He would open his books but couldn't concentrate just turning page after page without comprehending a word. For hours, he would sit alone thinking nothing and everything. He would go to the university and attend classes but absent-mindedly. He would face Sara but the two never talked. Some of his classmates would even jest at him but Ali would hardly notice that. Among them, only Javed was sympathetic to him. He would try to comfort and console him and advise him to forget the past. Javed had even complained to Sara about what he had done to Ali only to be rebuked by her.

Sara had noticed Ali's condition and she felt some remorse. It was the last week of their final semester. The course work was nearly complete after which the students would have three months to complete and submit their thesis. On that afternoon, Ali returned to class from the library to collect his folder. The room was empty except for one student, who happened to be Sara. Their eyes met and Ali just tried to slip. But she asked him to stop.

"This is my last day in the university and we mayn't meet again. So before we part, I want to say something to you," Sara said in a low tone looking deeply into Ali.

Ali didn't reply.

"I know," Sara began, "that I'm the most hated person for you and also the last that you would ever trust. So whatever I say will be the least important and credible for you. But still I request your patience. I was born with the proverbial silver spoon in my mouth. Being the only child of my parents, I remained the centre of their love and attention. From the beginning I was told that I was out of the ordinary, that I was the heir to a business empire and that I was born to command and exact obedience from others. As I grew up, papa told me that good is that benefits you and evil is that harms you, that intelligent action is always the right action and that ends justify means. Mama's untimely death was a great shock to me but papa told me that I had to be strong enough to bear such a loss.

"In the language of philosophy, I grew up a person who regards rational self-interest as the only legitimate motive for action. My papa says that if you're intelligent and have forbearance, you can grapple with any situation however intricate. To date I have acted on his advice. So what I did to you was the only intelligent response to a tricky situation. And I'm the least ashamed of it. But believe me, I never meant any harm to you and it's a pity that you have reached such a condition. It's the unintended consequence of my action, or

collateral damage as Americans would call it. And you would appreciate that one can't be held responsible for any collateral damage. But still I can understand how you feel for me."

Sara was on the point of saying 'sorry' to Ali but her arrogance prevented her from uttering that word.

"Are you finished?" Ali asked warily.

"Yes," Sara replied

And Ali went out without registering any complaint or protest, much to the surprise of his ex-spouse, who thought he would enter into some sort of argument with her. But the way he had ignored her made her feel that he cared little about what she had to say. However, that wasn't the case. It wasn't a conscious decision on the part of Ali. In fact, he hadn't listened to most of her monologue.

"What was Sara telling you?" Javed, who had overheard some of Sara's monologue, queried.

"I really don't remember," Ali replied in an abstract fashion.

"I guess she's having some pangs of conscience, otherwise why would she try to defend herself?" Javed observed.

"I really don't know. But even if she has pangs of conscience, does it really matter? She did what she thought was the best thing for her to do. But her words can't restore my trust in the world; it's shaken once and for all. Anyway, it's not a very pleasant subject for me so my I request you not to broach it again?"

"I'm sorry if I have hurt you but I didn't mean it. However, let's change the subject. We have another two days before we break. What are your plans? Javed asked."

I don't have any plans. To make plans, one needs to have confidence in oneself that one can achieve one's goals. I don't have any confidence in myself," Ali replied.

"Ok I can understand. But I have my plans. First of all I'll finish my thesis. In fact, I have already completed the first draft. Thereafter, I'll prepare for the civil service examination and if I qualify, I'll marry a beautiful, rich damsel, make a lot of money and have three or four children," Javed sketched his

future roadmap. “But as they say, man proposes and God disposes.”

“I don’t know. But in my case, a man proposed and a woman disposed,” Ali observed painfully. “But why I’m into that? What’s your research topic?

“Didn’t I share it with you before? I’m writing on the social disorder in our society. My thesis is simple: Social order, as you know my friend, is based on shared expectations among members of society. These expectations themselves are based on roles and status, rights and obligations that people have. In order to preserve the social order, it’s essential to fulfill these expectations. Of course, as no society is perfect, in no society are these expectations fully fulfilled. However, in most societies most of the times, these expectations are fulfilled, which means people do what’s expected of them. The result is social harmony and predictability.

“I give you an example. In our society, people drive on the left. Now imagine one fine morning when you are on your way to the university, you find some of the people driving to the right and some in the middle. What will happen? Collisions, accidents leading to loss of lives and disruption of traffic. The reason is that shared expectations weren’t fulfilled. Our society is facing a similar problem, of course, on a much larger scale and on a much more serious level, so much so that the entire social order is breaking. People by and large are not doing what they are supposed to do; or they do what they are not supposed to do.

“Military is supposed to defend the country against external aggression, not to take part in politics. But not only is it heavily politicized but has actually ruled the country for the better part of its history. Politicians aren’t supposed to indulge in loot and plunder but they actually do so and have brought the country on the brink of collapse. Judges are supposed to administer justice but instead of doing that they address public rallies and issue political statements like politicians. Sportsmen aren’t supposed to preach religion; this is the job of the clergy. But several of our cricketers have turned evangelist. Banks issue credit worth billions of rupees and then waive it off for political reasons. There are scores of such examples but the underlying point is that social order is on the verge of collapse,” Javed concluded.

“Interesting!” Ali acknowledged. “But what’s your conclusion? I mean do you think this trend can be arrested?”

“I’m yet to conclude, but I assume things have deteriorated so much that the social order is condemned to fall apart. However, in my thesis, I may come up with a different conclusion — slightly optimistic. You know the reason. Nobody likes pessimistic conclusions.”

“If you think the social order is bound to collapse, what would happen next? Would we be thrown into the proverbial state of nature?” Ali, who found himself interested in the topic, asked?

“Yes there will be chaos and disorder and even the society may disintegrate. But don’t ask me what will happen thereafter, simply because I’ve no idea,” Javed admitted.

“Tell we if we are on the verge of an inescapable disaster, why should we work so hard, especially why would you be part of a system, I mean the civil service, which is bound to collapse?”

“Here you get me. But still I think I can answer you. First, I may simply be wrong. The social order may survive. Secondly, even if it breaks down, it mayn’t happen immediately instead it may take years; so my hard work will not go waste. Thirdly, the breakdown of our social order doesn’t mean breakdown of the global order. Before the doomsday comes, we can fly to a safer place. Remember my friend in our society the people in privileged positions are always the last to be hit by a calamity and generally they find a safe exit. Take the war on terror. Who are the victims of bomb blasts and suicide attacks? By and large it’s the poor people. Tell me how many VVIPs and VIPs have perished? You can count them on your fingertips. Even those who kill themselves in these attacks come of poor families, while their mentors and masterminds are alive and kicking. So the moral of the story is that in our society the wealthier or more powerful you are, no matter on which side of the equation you happen to be, the longer is your life span and the safer you are,” Javed observed. “So that’s why I want to be rich and powerful. But if you have any other question, first buy me a drink.”

“I have no more questions but I’ll buy you a drink,” Ali replied.

Chapter 31

"I'm very sorry to hear that your son's marriage has broken down," Babu Javed remarked. He had met the Naqvis after a fairly long time. He even didn't attend Ali's marriage as he was away on an assignment at that time.

"I was surprised when you told me that Ali had married Seth Nisar's daughter. I'm very much familiar with the seth. For him what matters is only money and power and you have neither," he mentioned bluntly.

"Yes it was also surprising for us, especially they way they insisted that the wedding should take place immediately and without much ado," Mr Naqvi acknowledged looking at his wife.

"But did you not suspect something was wrong at the bottom?" Babu Javed asked.

"Yes I did. But then Ali told me Seth Nisar was doing that on the advice of his astrologer. I know several other people in high places, who are too superstitious to disregard the advice of their soothsayers. So we thought the same was the case with Nisar," Mr Naqvi explained.

"But to be sure, that was hardly the reason. As I have just said, I know Seth Nisar too well. He doesn't have any soothsayer."

"But then what can possibly be the reason?"

"Of late, Sara has told me that she married Ali because she had been placed in an awkward situation. We still wonder what that situation was." Mrs Naqvi interposed.

"I guess I can answer your question," Babu Javed said with a meaningful smile. "Seth Nisar," he continued, "worked for Maulvi Ziaur Rehman, the well-known religious figure and a mentor of the militants. My links told me that he wanted to marry Sara and had threatened Seth Nisar of dire consequences if he didn't accept his proposal," Babu Javed disclosed.

"Are you sure?" Mrs Naqvi interrupted him.

"Sister Fatima, I have long spied on Maulvi Zia. I also know why and how Seth Nisar was trapped by the maulvi, but that obviously will be of little interest to you."

“I confirm what Javed has said about the connection between Zia and Nisar,” Mr Naqvi endorsed.

“Hassan you knew that?” But you never shared the same with me,” Mrs Naqvi protested.

“I was under an obligation not to do so.” And then Mr Naqvi narrated how Sara had asked his help and that she had also met Maulvi Zia. “But I had never for a moment suspected what had driven Sara to marry Ali.”

“This is because you weren’t aware of Zia’s marriage proposal,” Babu Javed observed. “You journalists never have complete information and know only half truths.”

“This evening is full of surprises for me,” Mrs Naqvi remarked.

“Do you think Ali knew this?” Babu Javed queried.

“No we don’t think so. He’s still in the dark about the marriage motive and I think we shouldn’t share this information with him — at least not for now. He’s trying to recover and get over all this. But if Sara had married Ali just to avoid having to marry Zia, why did she get the marriage terminated? I mean Maulvi Zia can again come up with the marriage proposal?” Mrs Naqvi put a logical question.

“Maulvi Zia was killed in a drone attack in South Waziristan some time back. However, his body hasn’t been recovered.” Babu Javed made another revelation.

What? Maulvi Zia has been killed!” Mr Naqvi reacted. But the media are ignorant of his death.”

“It’s very confidential and I trust you will not leak it to the press. Actually, the government doesn’t want to make his death public unless it is confirmed.”

“Rest assured, this information will not go outside this room. But is not his death confirmed?”

“It can’t be confirmed until we find his body, though I can say on good authority that Zia is no more. As you would recall, a few months back, a frontline militant leader was reportedly killed in a drone attack; however his body wasn’t found. The government announced his death only to be embarrassed when he announced he was alive and kicking. So my brother, it’s decided that no militant leader’s death would be announced until we have its

conclusive evidence, which can only be in the event that his body is recovered," Babu Javed explained.

"So there's still a possibility — though a distant one — that Maulvi Zia is alive," Mrs Naqvi opined.

"I'll hate to answer your question in the affirmative but I'm afraid I'll have to."

"It's clear that Sara had the marriage dissolved at the instance of her father. Seth Nisar couldn't have advised her unless he was absolutely certain of Zia's death. But then how can he be so certain? Has he seen Zia's body or possibly its photograph?" Mr Naqvi asked.

"I don't know Hassan. Certainty is a state of the mind and everyone has himself to decide when and why and how much to be certain. Nisar's source at best can be someone who attended Zia's funeral — a sort of eye-witness account. But even such an account is not beyond doubt, because that eye-witness may simply be lying for one reason or another."

Are you still after Maulvi Zia's network," Mr Naqvi queried?

"Now you're asking too much?" Babu Javed returned.

"I'm sorry."

"Javed bhai how is Farzana?" Mrs Naqvi wanted to change the topic.

"She's all right. Her husband is quite mature a person — a perfect match for my immature daughter."

"You didn't invite us to her marriage," Mrs Naqvi complained.

"I'm sorry but I couldn't risk it. That's why I took her to Karachi, where the wedding took place."

"Does she know what Ali has been through?"

"No I haven't told her a word about that. This is one advantage of living away that you are immune from many things happening here. Let me admit, she was terribly upset when Ali got married. But that also did her one good: it made her finally agree to get married to a person of my choice."

"So at least there was something good about Ali's marriage," Mrs Naqvi said

sarcastically

“I’m sorry I didn’t mean it. It’s getting late. One thing before I leave. I have never liked Ali — and you know the reason — but I sincerely wish him to recover soon and start a new life.”

“Thanks.”

Chapter 32

Two weeks after he had handed in the thesis, Ali was called to defend the same before a three-member panel of professors. On his way to the university, he recalled how difficult an exercise it had been for him to write the thesis. To begin with, the choice of the topic itself proved a tough decision. He had shortlisted four topics and then on Sara's advice had reduced them to two. The choice between 'Radical Islam — a philosophy or strategy' and 'Political Economy of Thinking' proved very tough for Ali as he found himself equally interested in both. The first topic was the hot issue; had sufficient material available on it; and it was difficult to resist the temptation of writing on that.

The other topic by comparison was an obscure one. Neither Ali nor his professors were aware of any previous work on political economy of thinking. When Ali spoke to Dr Junaid, the research supervisor, his response was: "Would you be able to relate it to our contemporary society? If yes, then there can't be a better topic. If not, then choose another."

Ali himself wasn't sure whether he could do that. However, after a lot of decisions and indecisions, he finally decided to write on the political economy of thinking.

However, the real test came when Ali started writing the thesis. It coincided with the consummation of his unhappy marriage and its eventual dissolution and the great agony and uncertainty that he underwent during that period. It was an irony that a person who himself was a prisoner of excessive and defeatist thinking had to dissect different modes of thinking and how they were related to the contemporary society. Though Ali managed to meet the deadline for submission of the thesis, he knew he could have done a far better job if he had the peace of mind.

Briefly, Ali's thesis was this:

There are two modes of thinking: deductive and inductive. In case of deductive thinking, conclusions are drawn from a general proposition, which is assumed to be true. By contrast, inductive thinking consists in formulating a principle on the basis of particular instances observed or studied. For instance, from the premise that departure from religion is always at the root of social decline, one may infer through a chain of reasoning that enforcement of the Shariah is the magic wand which will effect a metamorphosis in the contemporary society. This is deductive thinking. On the other hand, someone may study the society and then conclude that there is no root and branch remedy for its problems. This is inductive thinking.

Deductive thinking is used to protect well-established beliefs and institutions; inductive thinking is used to question and examine the same. It consists in the willingness to see the other side of the picture.

Inductive thinking does not necessarily lead to rejection of established beliefs or institutions, which may in fact stand vindicated upon enquiry. What is vital to inductive thinking is the spirit of enquiry and skepticism, the ability to question and review one's basic position or assumptions, irrespective of where the process ends up.

In every society, both inductive and deductive thinking are used. In every society, from the most primitive to the most advanced, from the most conservative to the most liberal, deductive thinking is the dominant mode of thinking. The reason is simple: Every society has basic ethical and metaphysical assumptions, which individuals are supposed to follow. In no society are the 'delinquents' looked upon with a great deal of approval. Likewise, in every society, inductive thinking is the privilege of a relatively small group of people. These people, who realize that the prevalent values and institutions leave a lot to be desired, are the real engine of change. The challenge for this group is to convince the masses, who think deductively most of the time, of the desirability of change.

Societies however differ in the levels of the two modes of thinking. Thus in a religious or totalitarian society, the level of inductive thinking is remarkably lower than that in a liberal, democratic society. This is because in a religious or totalitarian society inductive thinking is almost a taboo. By contrast in a liberal, democratic society by virtue of its essential principles there is a greater freedom to think inductively. Hence, while a dictator may get away with denying freedom of expression, a democratically elected leader will find it extremely difficult to do so.

Inductive thinking is inextricably bound with freedom of expression. One would hardly think of questioning the prevalent system if one could not express one's discontent. Taken broadly, the threats to freedom of expression can stem from two sources: the government and society. A regime rooted in sheer force allows the people to speak only in favor of the established order. No one is supposed to question the legitimacy of the regime, which is taken for granted. Therefore, any expression of the discontent is quelled. In absolute monarchies, the fundamental premise is that the king can do no wrong, and all other judgments about the monarch have to follow from it. Obviously if it is assumed that the ruler can never do wrong, one can only praise his policies. Similar is the belief that the rulers have a divine mission to accomplish and therefore any opposition to their regime is simply opposition to Allah — the gravest of all sins.

A more serious threat to freedom of expression than a despotic government is an intolerant society. In such societies, ideas that are at variance with traditional beliefs are simply branded as dangerous or heretic. Such societies are characterized by uncritical acceptance of the authority, which may be the church, the Brahmin, the mullah or the "great' leader. A classic example of an intolerant society is the medieval European society, where the church wielded absolute power over the minds of the people. In recent times, the Taliban established a monolithic, retrogressive society in Afghanistan based on a rigid, primitive interpretation of Islam, where even a slight departure from the enforced code of conduct was severely punished. The establishment of such a society is the goal of the militants in Pakistan.

Education is also an important instrument of inculcating inductive thinking. But only that type of education does this job that inculcates a spirit of enquiry and skepticism among students. Arguably nothing is more dangerous to inductive thinking than an education system based on indoctrination, where all teaching proceeds from certain ideas assumed to be as true as the axioms of mathematics. An obvious example of this is the education imparted in religious seminaries or madaris. This is why students who graduate from these madaris do not develop a scientific attitude. What they develop is the incorrigible habit to defend, justify or impose a set of beliefs about their own creed through polemics or by force. The madaris are defended on the ground that they provide free of cost education to the poor. But we also need to see what kind of education they are imparting and what is the social cost of this 'free of cost' education?

Economic factors also bear upon the ability to think inductively or otherwise. Generally inductive thinking is associated with the middle class. The upper class and the lower class mostly think deductively. The upper class has all its stakes in the continuation of the status quo. The members of that class are made to think that the existing institutions and system are the best that can possibly be; therefore, what is needed is to preserve the same. A capital reason that the contemporary Pakistani society has had political transition and no real political transformation is that the political leadership, whether dictatorial or wearing the robes of democracy, is by and large drawn from the upper class. Hence, whatever changes are brought in the system are at best peripheral —such as replacing mayors with nazims and then reverting to the old nomenclature; abolishing and reviving the office of the deputy commissioner and, at the most, increasing or diluting the powers of the president.

The lower class is too much occupied in meeting basic needs of life to afford the luxury of inductive thinking. This leaves the middle class as the torchbearer of inductive thinking. Opportunity for higher education, some

measure of economic security, some grievances against the system and a desire for upward social mobility make for inductive thinking.

The media have an important role to play in shaping thinking. Since social reality is both objective and subjective, the media can reconstruct the same by presenting facts in a particular way. The media can turn a hero into a villain and vice versa. It is the way the media reconstruct reality that they can promote or constrain inductive thinking. The media which are wedded to a particular philosophy at best present only half-truths and thus impede inductive thinking. Media can present the both sides of the picture and thus become an instrument of inductive thinking only if it they are free from the shackles of a particular philosophy.

Whether by chance or by design, Sara was also called to defend her thesis on the same day at the same time. Ali hadn't seen her since their brief encounter in the last week of the final semester. When Ali entered the philosophy department, Sara was already there. Their exchanged glances and Sara at once noticed intense agony in Ali's eyes. He was pale and thinner and as usual looking self-absorbed as if trying to think over some philosophic puzzle. Sara on the other hand was her usual self: charming, confident, and self-assured with an air of arrogance about her. For a moment, both remained silent but then Sara realized Ali wouldn't speak to her not because he was annoyed with her but because of his natural shyness and procrastination. So she went up to him and asked, "How's life?"

"Ah! As usual, without any meaning, purpose and direction," Ali replied in a melancholy way.

"You have always been interested more in the meaning of life than in life itself. Learn to live and then life will become meaningful and purposeful."

"Yes you're right. I have a lot to learn," Ali said sarcastically uncharacteristic of him.

"I know what you are driving at. But trust me life is continuous learning. We have been friends and of course husband and wife. I wish you to lead a happy and successful life drawing upon your mistakes."

"So you agree my decision to marry you was a mistake?"

"Mistake, my dear, is a relative term. If a decision harms you, it's a mistake, even a blunder, depending upon the enormity of the harm. Now whether your decision to marry me was a mistake, it's for you to decide. For me it wasn't."

“This is because you think only in terms of profit and loss, benefit and harm to yourself only,” Ali noted grudgefully.

“This is the right mode of thinking,” Sara responded with her signature smile. The real world is a ruthless place, where if you don’t know what is good and what is bad for you, you can’t defend yourself and if you can’t defend yourself, rest assured no one will come to your rescue. The world is the spectacle of war of one against all in which you’re either a winner or a loser — there can hardly be a middle position. All our strength and all our energies, all our morality and all our values, all our knowledge and all our wisdom, all our sentiments and all our sensibilities, all our desires and all our aspirations are futile if they don’t make us better equipped in this war. Your problem is that you’re not equipped to fight this war, because you see the world not as it is but as it ought to be.”

“So you justify treachery, double dealing, opportunism, hypocrisy and things like these just because they help you win your war!”

“I needn’t justify them; they are their own justification,” Sara replied with the calmness of a stoic. “What you call treachery, I consider it to be intelligence; what you call double dealing, I regard it as smartness; what you call opportunism, I deem it realism; what you call hypocrisy, I consider self-control and diplomacy. People who play and lose cry foul play not realizing they didn’t play well enough to win. The people who can’t use their intelligence profitably call it treachery; those who aren’t capable of holding their emotions in check call it hypocrisy and so on. So it’s for you to decide whether to play well and win, or lose and cry foul. Yes we don’t always win. But even when we lose, it’s for us to decide whether we want to be a good or a bad loser depending on whether we are willing to learn from our mistakes. I am sorry but not only are you a loser but also a bad loser.”

“What about you? Are you a good loser? Or you only win and never lose?”

“So far there’s nothing which I aimed at but didn’t achieve. But of course one who plays should also be prepared to lose. If ever I have to face defeat, I’ll do so with all dignity and full sense of responsibility without putting the blame on the other side,” Sara replied.

“Tell me what did you learn and what did you get from our botched relationship?” Ali asked.

“I married you on purpose and I achieved that purpose. Now what that purpose was, I need not tell you now. I may tell you some other time. Or

maybe you'll come to know of that by some other means."

"But you also lost your credibility? You have been deprived not only of a friend but also of a person who loved you? Did you not?"

"Even if I have lost my credibility with you and your family and a friend and a lover in you, it's not a bad deal. To me, the pros clearly outweigh the cons. Besides, I don't care the least about how you and your parents look upon me. As for the loss of a friend and a lover, well in life you meet a number of people, who will leave you at some point. No relationship is permanent. I may find another friend or lover more loyal or more passionate or more useful than you. After all, you're not the last man in the world," Sara responded.

"Suppose someone gives the same treatment to you which you meted out to me. How would you react?"

"Well, in the first place I'm not naïve enough to let someone take me for a ride. But granted that someone is smart enough to do so, then like a good loser I'll learn from my mistakes and accept my defeat with dignity. You know when you are defeated, it means two things: One, that your opponent played well; and two, that you played bad."

"But what if someone cheats you?"

"Cheating is part of the game my dear. The cheater is only a person who is wiser, more intelligent, smarter or cleverer, whatever you call it. Anyhow, good luck to you." With those words, Sara went in for the interview.

Chapter 33

The interview panel comprised Dr Junaid, Prof Najeeb and Prof Rameez. As he entered the room, Ali recalled his pre-admission interview and he realized how quickly time had passed. After customary remarks, the interview began.

"What do you think of thinking?" Dr Junaid opened the discussion.

"Sir thinking is a problem solving activity and the problems come from society and the roles and status that we have; we are supposed to have; or we want to have; or we may have; or we may never have. We live in more than one world at the same time. One is the world of facts in which things just are. Another is the world of values, which presents things as they ought to be or as they ought not to be. A third is the world of contingency, which contains what may be but which is not yet. And finally there is the world of the impossible, which contains things which can never be. Such a world is by definition an empty set. Thinking is the vehicle by which we move between these worlds, it's the thread between these worlds and at least in part their creator," Ali explained.

"You said we live in more than one world. Which of these is the real world?" Dr Junaid asked.

"On the face of it, the world of facts is the real world. But in point of fact, the answer to your question depends on how we define the word 'real'. The real may be actual but the actual may be a mere illusion concealing the real. In the end, we may know or achieve the real or it may prove a wild goose chase. The point that I want to make is that we are never satisfied with what we have or what is before us and endeavor incessantly to go beyond that. The world of facts may not be unreal but it doesn't necessarily represent the whole reality."

"But what we aspire for is also the world of facts," Dr Junaid remarked. "If we don't have money, we want to be rich; if we don't have the fame, we wish to be famous."

"But the fame or the riches, the peace of mind or the salvation of the soul, we aspire for don't exist. They are an ideal yet to be sought. But this doesn't make them unreal, otherwise we'll not run after them," Ali returned.

"And that reality is conferred by thought. Is this your position?" Dr Junaid enquired.

"Partly, not wholly. Mere thought isn't the author of these worlds. Thought, in

fact, is both a creature and creator of the worlds, an effect as well as a cause. Thought is one factor which makes us what we are or what we wish to be but what we are or what we wish to be also shapes our thought. In sum, it's a two-way process," Ali explained.

It was evident from Dr Junaid's face that he didn't find Ali's argument persuasive. But he remained silent.

"You said thinking is a problem solving activity. Does this apply to both inductive and deductive thinking?" Prof Najeeb asked.

"Yes sir. Both types of thinking are geared towards problem solving. But they solve it in their own way. Deductive thinking does so by affirming the established order of things. Inductive thinking does so by questioning and at times repudiating and dismantling the established order. Deductive thinking is a search for certainty; inductive thinking is content with probability. Deductive thinking begins by assuming; inductive thinking begins by doubting. Deductive thinking preserves; Inductive thinking destroys and then recreates. Deductive thinking is thus the basis of religion; Inductive thinking is the foundation of science. Society needs both religion and science, both dogma and doubt, both permanence and change, both stability and progress. Hence, both modes of thinking are useful." That was Ali's reply.

"But don't you think science needs both induction and deduction and even religion at times asks people to believe in God only if there's sufficient evidence for His existence?" Prof Najeeb put a counter question.
"Science does use both induction and deduction. But the deductions of science are inferred from a general proposition, which is arrived at following particular observations. By contrast, the deductions of religion more often than not rest independently of empirical evidence. As for the second part of your question, I don't deny that religion at times enjoins upon as to believe in God on the basis of empirical evidence. But the belief once arrived at has to be conclusive and not tentative, certain and not probable," Ali explained.

"Does thinking shape culture or is it the other way round?" Prof Rameez also entered into the discussion.

"Sir in my view, the relationship between thinking and culture is a two-way traffic. On one hand, what we think and how we think is shaped by our society and our place in it —the role and status that we have. The thinking of a professor is different from that of a carpenter, that of a politician from an auto mechanic's, that of the wealthy from the pauper's. By and large, people in an industrial society think differently from those in a tribal society. On the other hand, thought is the instrument by which we know, understand and change

society and our role and position in that. Our thought enables us to understand and transcend our predicament," Ali replied.

Ali was an impressionable mind. Though in the presence of Sara he apparently didn't agree with her views, on his way back home after the interview he was preoccupied with what she had told him clearly and plainly.

"Is it possible that Sara is right; that her stark realism is the right understanding of the world and the right response to it? Is there something fundamentally wrong with the way I look upon the world? Are my basic ethical and metaphysical assumptions fundamentally flawed?" he questioned himself.

Ali's family wasn't religious — at least not in the traditional sense of the word. However, he was brought up in the typical middle class morality, which was much like conventional religious morality. He was taught that one must be fair in one's dealings with others, that honesty is the best policy, that one shouldn't seek one's happiness at the expense of others; that virtue is its own reward, that in the struggle between good and evil, good was destined to triumph, etc.

Though following his study of philosophy, Ali's belief in God was shaken and he would oscillate between faith and atheism, the conventional morality that he had internalized was still intact. Hence, in Ali we had a person whose faith in God had been thrown into doubt but his belief in the primacy of virtue and goodness was too strong to be displaced —a person who might doubt whether there was life in the hereafter, but who strongly believed that the world was governed by moral laws, which ensured the victory of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of altruism over egoism, of truthfulness over duplicity.

However, the self-assurance with which Sara had defended her position created dents in Ali's moral envelope. No doubt it didn't happen suddenly but developed out of his unhappy relationship with Sara. Another thing which had contributed to that was his interview. His thesis in a nutshell was that inductive thinking consisted in the willingness to question and revise one's basic assumptions in the light of fresh facts and new evidence. "Have you ever done so?" Dr Junaid had asked him. And Ali was too honest to answer in the affirmative, which prompted the professor to advise him to do so.

"If the existence of God is thrown into doubt, why shouldn't the same be the case with the ethics which is grounded in His existence? I have been taught that the source of all morality is God. Suppose God doesn't exist, which logically is not an impossible proposition. In the absence of God, where do conventional ethical values stand? Who will ensure that good triumphs over

evil or that virtue is rewarded and vice penalized? Justice is the ultimate virtue. But man is incapable of doing justice, because either he is too weak or too bad. Either he seeks only his own good regardless of that of others or he is too weak to be an equalizer. Only God who is absolutely good and powerful can ensure justice. But if God doesn't exist, who is there to do justice? And if justice is impossible, why should we seek it? Why shouldn't we just seek our own happiness? Why should we see the world through the glasses of goodness and virtue? Why shouldn't we see the world as it is? Isn't my predicament due to the fact that I don't face the world as it is? Why should I think and act on the basis of the assumptions whose validity is not well beyond doubt?"

Such were the questions which now preoccupied Ali's mind. But as usual, he was unable to come up with a categorical answer. His intellect told him that he had no reason to stick to the conventional morality but in his heart of hearts he knew that if for nothing else, he lacked the courage to break the shell of the conventional values and look at and face the world as it was.

Chapter 34

It was 9 in the evening in Peshawar. A bearded man entered the premises of a villa, situated on the outskirts of the city, owned by an influential politician, who also happened to be a minister in the government. The man was casually searched and taken to the basement through a secret pavement. At the end of the pavement, there were a few rooms He was made to wait outside one of the rooms for a while and then asked to go inside.

"The government is convinced that I'm dead but they will not make it public unless they find my body," Maulvi Zia told Maulana Majeed, the man who had just arrived. "Since they will never find my body, they will never announce my death," he added.

"Maulvi sahib it's by the grace of God that you narrowly escaped the infidels' attack. You are the life and soul of our mission. But when will you make a public appearance?"

"For the time being I think I should watch the things quietly. It will also give me the time to fully recover."

"As always, you're the best judge."

"How are the things in the White Mosque?"

"A police picket has been set up near the mosque and we suspect agencies are also keeping an eye on us. The *mujahideen* have strict orders not to come to the mosque," Maulana Majeed briefly replied.

"Ok. Who else knows that I'm not dead?"

"I'm the only one sir. As instructed, I have kept it to myself."

"Any news of Dr Junaid?"

"He is abroad, probably in Europe."

"Ok. I have called you on purpose," Maulvi Zia said in a low tone. "Listen carefully to what I'm going to say." And then for a few minutes he gave Maulana Majeed some instructions.

"I'll do as you say," Majeed assured Zia.

Examination of his basic assumptions revealed to Ali that there was little if any valid reason to hold them. But he also realized that there was little if any reason to hold the contrary assumptions.

"If there is no cogent reason to hold that honesty is the best policy, is there any cogent reason to hold that honesty is the worst policy or for that matter that dishonesty is the best policy? Of course, I may maintain that honesty or dishonesty is the best policy depending upon my personal interest. I may be honest or dishonest if being so is to my advantage. This means any criterion of right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice must consist in personal interest or usefulness. But again is there any cogent reason that it should be so? Why should my personal advantage outweigh that of others? There is no cogent reason. Again, how far should a person go in securing his advantage or pursuing his interest? Should I pursue my good in utter disregard of that of others? Even if I have to kill someone for the pleasure of the moment, am I entitled to do so?"

The more Ali pondered over such questions, the more he realized that answer to them was not that simple.

"But then why should one act? Or why should there be a reason for acting in a particular way? The search for reason is a search for meaning. Why shouldn't I just act without bothering to look for the meaning? Don't psychoanalysts and behaviorists tell us in their own way that either there is no reason for our action or even if there's any reason, it's not what we are conscious of? We act just because we have to act depending on how we, given our psychic and physiological condition, react to external forces. But if such an interpretation of the psychology of moral action is to be accepted, then does it make any sense to dub some of our actions rational while others irrational, some intelligent and others stupid? All actions are equally rational or irrational. The one who commits suicide is acting as much rationally or irrationally as one who is trying to save one's life — since all actions spring from causes of which neither we are aware nor we can control. But if this is true, then there is no difference between the saint and the sinner, the philosopher and the fool, the angelic and the devilish, the pious and the wicked, the savior and the terminator, the intelligent and the idiot. But can this really be so?"

While Ali was engrossed in these arguments and counter arguments, Mr Naqvi entered the room. Seeing his father, Ali rose.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you," Mr Naqvi remarked.

“Certainly not.”

“So what’s up?”

“Nothing special father. I was just thinking why people act the way they act.”

“Interesting question! So what’s your conclusion?”

“I’m afraid I’m still in the dark. The more I think, the more questions crop up. But you want anything of me?

”Well, I was just wondering what you have in mind about your future. Your studies are almost complete, so any plans for the future?”

Ali held his peace, as he didn’t know what to say.

“Please don’t get me wrong. I don’t want you to decide anything in haste.”

“I understand father. But I’m yet to make up my mind. You know I’m not good or quick at making decisions. I almost ruined my life by making a wrong decision.”

“Don’t think like that. We all make mistakes even blunders. The important thing is to learn from your mistakes. Making mistakes is not bad but repeating them is. Now I’m being didactic, which I don’t like. But do you want to study further?”

“Books are my only passion but this passion need not be satisfied through formal studies. At times, I think I should appear in the civil service examination. I guess I’ll make a decision by the time the final result is announced.”

“Ok. Take your time. My only advice to you is to concentrate on one thing at one time, on one goal, whatever it may be. Don’t let your energies scatter. This is one lesson I have learnt and learnt so the hard way. Perhaps you don’t know, I wanted to be an author but ended up being a journalist. I have no complaints in my life, no regrets, no grievances against any one. In fact I’m fortunate to have got the best woman as my life partner. What little I have accomplished I owe it to your mother. But sometimes I feel I could have led a better or more fruitful life if I had better managed my time and energies.”

“But father you can still do what you wanted to do. You still have a long way to go.”

"I don't know. I think it's too late and I should better concentrate on what I have been doing for last twenty-five years. You know there's one big disadvantage of being a journalist —you don't go into things deeply. Your approach becomes rather skin-deep and you tend to be guided by popular notions. Journalism is like a steroid — it gives quick results but at enormous cost; it saps any creativity that you have. So another piece of advice from me is not to dabble into journalism. You must be wondering why I am giving you advice after advice. But somehow I can't help it."

Ali felt that his father wanted to talk more. His mother was not at home, having gone to a wedding. The father and son had held detailed discussions but almost always on some public issue. Mr Naqvi had seldom talked to Ali about himself. But that evening he seemed to be forthcoming about himself. Ali always wanted to know more about his father, how he thought and felt not about media and politics but about himself. Was he satisfied with his life? Did he have any regrets? What he wanted to achieve in life?
"Father what do you think life is?"

"Dear," Mr Naqvi began, "there was a time when like you I was deeply interested in that question, though I admit I never systematically studied philosophy or psychology so my thought was not that profound. My father died when I was a student and I had to do different part time jobs to survive and study. So from quite an early age I suffered from an acute sense of insecurity, which persists to date though economically we are fairly well-off. I'm telling you this because my view of life has largely been shaped by this sense of insecurity. After I married your mother, who came of a rich and influential family, for many years I would fear she might leave me though I knew she was a woman of the highest character and loved me intensely. That's why my approach to life has been largely defensive — concerned more about avoiding losing what I have than achieving what I don't have.

"As to your question what I think life is, I would say life is too complex to have a definition. But if you insist on a definition, then a popular definition is that life is constant struggle not only against the external world but also against oneself. I have since long subscribed to this view. But of late I have started to realize the inadequacy of this view. It's good even necessary to struggle in life. But too much emphasis on struggle or resistance divests life of its beauty, which consists in simply enjoying whatever one has. Besides, equating life with struggle enormously narrows its scope. There are numerous things in life other than struggle, resistance, fight or such other jingoistic terms. Have you studied Zen Buddhism?"

"A little bit," Ali, who was amazed at the question, replied.

“I studied Zen Buddhism long ago. I have been to Japan, where it’s a popular philosophy. I’m afraid most of what I read or heard about Zen has slipped my memory but I still remember a few things. It’s important to find the meaning of life but it’s not by speculation but by living that you find the same. There are many important things in life like wealth and comfort, beauty and love, truth and intelligence, knowledge and wisdom but life is much more than these. It’s good to be wealthy but one can live without wealth. It’s good to be wise but even for a fool there is much in life.”

“But father Zen is based on the philosophy of resignation. Don’t you think it’s better to make effort than to resign oneself to circumstances?”

“Now you’re trying to knock me out,” Mr Naqvi raised his hands. “It’s difficult to argue with a philosopher. Yes, it’s better to endeavour than resign, struggle than submit, but there is wisdom in resignation as well, in taking things as they come. Similarly, it’s good to plan for the future but there’s also some wisdom in living in the present. Again, it’s good to change things but there is also some wisdom in quietly accepting things as they are. I may be contradicting myself but this is how it is.”

“You are a different person than I have known.”

“You thought a journalist can’t talk like an intellectual — just joking.”

“Are you satisfied with your life?”

“Son, there’s no such thing as absolute satisfaction. Man is incapable of two things: One of them is to be wholly satisfied with what he has or where he is. So I’m largely satisfied with my life but of course not completely.”

“And what is the other thing of which man is incapable?”

“Unconditional love,” Mr Naqvi replied.

“I’m sorry I don’t understand? Isn’t love always unconditional?” Ali asked.

“No my son; love is never unconditional. When we love someone, we come to have some expectations of them — maybe love in return, maybe respect, maybe affection, maybe care, maybe attention, maybe sacrifice. If these expectations aren’t fulfilled, love loses its warmth. Tell me you love me and your mother. If tomorrow you come to know something about us which you never expected, would your love still be the same?”

“What are you talking about? I don’t expect anything of that sort on your part.” Ali glanced at his father in amazement.

“Ok, I ask you another question: You loved Sara. Do you still love her?”

Ali replied in the negative.

“Exactly! There’s an important lesson in this. If someone loves you, respect their feelings at least even if you can’t love them.”

At that moment, the door bell rang.

“Perhaps your mother is back. I go and see,” Mr Naqvi said.

At that time Ali didn’t realize that it was his last detailed encounter with his father.

Chapter 35

"Your husband is dead," a police officer broke the news to Mrs Naqvi.

It was five in the evening. Ali had gone to library and Mrs Naqvi was alone at home. The door bell rang and she saw three policemen standing at the entrance.

"My name is inspector Tanveer Khan," one of them introduced himself. Does Mr Hassan Naqvi live here?"

"Yes. But he's not at home. Is everything ok? I'm Mrs Naqvi."

"I'm afraid we have a bad news for you. Your husband Hassan Naqvi is dead.

"What's this nonsense? How could it be? I spoke to him barely three hours ago."

"Madam he was leaving his office when someone shot at him and he died on the spot. His body is in hospital."

The inspector had barely finished when two colleagues of Mr Naqvi reached there and confirmed what the inspector had said.

Mr Naqvi was a well-known and widely respected journalist and the news of his death spread in the city in a short time. People from various walks of life started to come to his home to condole his death. An inquiry was ordered into the killing. The investigators quizzed Mrs Naqvi and Ali whether they suspected anyone. The mother and the son were shocked at the death of Mr Naqvi. They couldn't believe that anyone could kill him as he had no enemies.

However, Manzoor Ahmad, Mr Naqvi's news editor, had something different to tell. He told the investigators that Mr Naqvi was working on a big story regarding the nexus between the militants and the agencies. "He told me he had some evidence of that nexus. So I suspect that the people he was going to expose were behind his murder."

"Did he drop you any hint who those people were," an investigator asked?

"No he didn't. He would never share information unless he had it complete. Not even with his editor."

"Anyone else who could be of help to us? I mean the deceased must have

some close friends. I'm sorry I'm putting this question to you, because the deceased's family is too shocked to answer any questions."

"I'll be glad to help apprehend the culprits," Manzoor Ahmad replied. "No Hassan didn't have any friends. He was essentially a private person devoted only to two things — his work and family. Even I didn't count myself a friend of his, though we worked together for two decades. His only friend if I'm correct and I hope the deceased's family will bear me out is Babu Javed, who is also related to him, and intriguingly enough works for an intelligence agency. I have the feeling that if anyone can help you it's him."

The death of Mr Naqvi was a bolt from the blue for his family. For Mrs Naqvi, he was not only her husband but also her best friend. Throughout, their relationship had remained exemplary and there had never been a shadow between them. But she was also a brave woman and knew that she had to be strong to face up to the world. She was particularly concerned about her son, who needed her support to bear up the loss. Therefore, she put up a brave face and consoled Ali, for whom the loss of his father was too much of a shock given the fact that he was a man of weak nerves and was easily upset when something went wrong.

One of the people who had come to condole the demise of Mr Naqvi was Farzana. After her marriage she had settled in a distant city. However, she couldn't get along with her husband, who was fifteen years older than her, and their marriage broke down.

After spending some time with Mrs Naqvi, Farzana went to see Ali, who was in his room.

"I'm extremely grieved at the death of uncle Naqvi. He had been very kind and affectionate to me like a father. But it's the will of God." Farzana spoke the customary sentences. However, Ali didn't speak in reply and even didn't look at her.

"I also feel sorry that your marriage has ended."

Ali remained silent.

"Perhaps you don't know but my marriage has also broken down," she added.

Again, there wasn't a single word from Ali.

"Why don't you speak? Do you dislike my being here? If that's the case, then I had better leave."

Farzana was on the point of leaving the room when Ali rose from the chair and looking at her abstractly said, "No please stop. Forgive me but I'm too shattered to respond to you. Thanks for coming and for the kind words. I'm sorry that your marriage didn't work. What happened?"

Hamid is a nice man but somehow we couldn't get along. Perhaps we weren't made for each other."

"How do we know that we aren't made for each other?" Ali realizing that he and Sara were also not made for each other remarked. "I mean marriage like any other major decision in life is a leap in the dark. You may get into the right place or you may stumble into a pitfall. I know my parents were made for each other. They loved, respected, understood and trusted each other. I don't know how my mother will bear the loss of my father."

"Yes it's an enormous loss for her but I know she has the courage and the fortitude."

Farzana wanted to ask Ali what drove him and Sara apart but she restrained herself from doing so lest it might disconcert him. "If you don't mind can I see you again," she asked?

"Yes. As usual I'm short of friends. But more than I mother needs your company."

One person Ali anxiously waited for was Sara. But she neither visited him nor even made a call to condole the death of her former father-in-law.

"Maybe she doesn't know that my father is dead," Ali tried to console himself. "But how could it be. The death has been widely reported in the media. Maybe she is not in the country. Yes she had told me that she was planning to go abroad."

Sara had neither gone abroad nor was she unaware of the killing of Mr Naqvi. She was saddened at the tragedy but had decided to stay away from Ali. Ever since she had parted ways with Ali, she was a solitary figure again spending most of her time in the study surfing the Internet or reading. Her father would occasionally ask her to join his business but her answer always was that she wasn't yet prepared for the same and that she had planned to go abroad for doctoral studies. Those days she, like her other class fellows, was waiting for the assessment of her thesis leading to the award of the degree. She had written on Nietzsche's theory of transvaluation of values and wanted to do

doctorate on the same. The German philosopher had appealed to her enormously for having enthroned strength and intelligence as the greatest of virtues and denounced weakness and foolishness as the most despicable of vices.

To Sara, weakness and foolishness had their place as well in the moral order, for the strength of one was built on the weakness of many and the intelligence of one was of little avail unless it was used to exploit the stupidity of others.

“Representative democracy, the cherished political system of the modern world, rests on how successfully the intelligent few exploit the stupid majority in the name of popular sovereignty,” so maintained Sara in the thesis. “The strong need the weak; the genius needs the ordinary mortals, to make their mark.”

The combination of strength and intelligence, Sara believed, was a lethal one capable of surmounting any obstacle and overcoming any resistance. The most successful people in the world and in history were those who had abundance of both. On the other hand, a person who had neither was doomed to despair and failure, ruin and annihilation.

Sara considered herself to be strong and intelligent; however, she believed she had one fatal weakness — her love for her father. She thought she could grapple with any problem except a situation in which her father was at the receiving end. It was only for the sake of her father that she had married Ali.

“Now that that devil called Maulvi Zia is dead, papa is free and I trust he’ll not fall into a similar trap,” so thought Sara.

However, one question that still troubled her was how Seth Nisar fell into the trap of Maulvi Zia. She believed he must have had some weakness, which the wily maulvi had exploited. But what was that? For her that question was important, because someone else might do the same. So she decided to speak to Seth Nisar firmly.

“Papa I have one question to ask, which I believe you’ll answer.”

“Anything for you sweetheart.”

“How did you fall into Maulvi Zia’s trap?”

“I believe the maulvi is dead and the chapter is closed. What’s then the point of asking this?”

“Just out of curiosity.”

“Then let your curiosity remain unsatisfied.”

“But what if I insist?”

“Dear I would have told you much before if I could. However, just to quench your thirst, I did something unworthy of me, which Maulvi Zia documented. More than that, I can’t speak of.”

“Ok. But that document or evidence will still be available with Zia’s men. They can again use it against you.”

“Yes they can. But Zia is no more and his movement was so thoroughly dependent upon him that I needn’t fear them. In any event, since his death I haven’t received any message from his men, which means I’m safe now and you can rest assured. By the way did you condole the demise of your former father-in-law?” Seth Nisar asked.

“Not yet,” Sara said moving her hands. “But coming back to my question, can’t you ask Maulvi Zia’s men to return you the evidence against you?”

“I might have done so if I knew who to ask,” Seth Nisar replied.

Chapter 36

The question for Ali, as for many others, was who had killed his father and why. He recalled how the deceased had talked to him candidly about himself only two days before his death. But he didn't drop even a hint that his life was in danger. Nor did he share any such thing with his wife, with whom he was wont to sharing everything. This strongly suggested that whatever happened to him was out of the blue.

Death was one problem on which Ali had never meditated. The demise of his father also opened that window on him and he began to ponder on death. The more he pondered, the more fascinated the problem appeared to him so much so that the question who killed his father appeared to him far less intriguing than the question what death signified.

"Death is the end of life. But why should life end?"

The proposition that death was the end of life seemed to Ali no more than a tautology.

"Yes death is the end of life. But it is also the end of all thoughts and feelings, emotions and sentiments, hopes and aspirations, woes and sufferings, joys and pleasures. It is also the end of the world, because for me the world comes into being and passes into nothingness with the beginning and end of my life. While I'm alive, I have the feeling that I have always been in the world, because I never experienced a moment when I didn't exist. Though I see the people around me pass away, I continue to live. Life then is being and death nothingness. To die means to pass from being into nothingness."

This then is the common fate of all. However powerful and intelligent a person, he has to taste death. No medicine, no mantra, no money, no trick, no prayers will save him from the grave. We are all doomed to nothingness. But is death necessarily nothingness? Isn't it the beginning of a new life in the hereafter or in this world in a different form? Most religions affirm in their own way that this is the case. But do we have any evidence of this? We see people die but we don't see anyone come back to life."

While brooding over death, Ali fell asleep. He dreamed that it was the Day of Judgment. The Almighty was holding His court assigning people heaven or hell on the basis of their deeds. Everyone was waiting for their turn in absolute fear. Ali himself was trembling badly.

"So I was wrong," he admitted to himself. "I doubted the existence of God, of the soul, immortality and the hereafter, because I saw no empirical evidence

for them. Woe to me; how mistaken I was that I lived all along on wrong assumptions! But I'm not the only one who was mistaken. Most of the people I knew acted as if they would never be made accountable for their deeds. A similar fate must be in store for them."

"Ali Naqvi, son of Fatima Naqvi, may please come forward," an imperious voice made the announcement and a strong hand pushed Ali in front of a majestic throne.

The throne was empty but a voice seemed to be coming from all over addressed him: "Welcome to the hereafter and to the real and the never ending life. To be brief and to the point, your bad deeds grossly overweigh your good deeds. Most of the time, you neglected your duties towards others. At times you were just, but your justice was divorced from mercy. At times you were merciful, but your mercy rested on a false sense of pride. Most of your apparently good deeds lacked purity of intention and were done either out of fear of social disapproval or to make a parade of your righteousness. Worse, your faith in God was never beyond doubt. You believed in and turned to God only when you were deeply in trouble. Your belief in God thus sprang from convenience rather than conviction, fear rather than love. Before we announce our judgment about you, we would like to give you an opportunity to speak in your defense. Have you anything to say?"

Ali remained speechless for a while and then picking up the courage began, "I strongly regret that my misdeeds outweigh my good deeds and that my faith in God was never indubitable. But I believe I was programmed to think and do what I thought and did. It couldn't have been otherwise."

"A very weak pretext!" the voice responded. "Were you not given eyes to see, ears to hear, the heart to feel and the mind to think? Didn't your senses inform you of the justice and order, harmony and proportion in the world? Didn't your heart feel the presence of a cosmic power, who created and sustained the world? Didn't your reason enlighten you of the presence of a Supreme Intelligence that fashioned and ordered the events? The fact is that you had all the reasons and all the faculties to be good and righteous but you chose to be otherwise."

"You mentioned my lord of the order, harmony and justice in the world. Did the world really have such attributes? In the world that God created, the strong crushed the weak, the mighty exploited the vulnerable, the shrewd duped the simple. Worse, the tyrants would always get away with impunity. Was that divine justice? The world was characterized by the extremes of poverty and wealth, ugliness and beauty, adversity and prosperity, suffering and luxury, strength and sickness. Was that divine order and proportion? To cut the long

story short, there was so much evil and so little good, so much vice and so little virtue, so much wickedness and so little righteousness, in the world. Was that divine intelligence?" Ali put in the counter argument.

"If by making such remarks you are trying to justify your misdeeds, then we are afraid you are widely off the mark. The world had evil no doubt but there was good as well; it had ugliness but there was beauty as well. It was possible for God to make a world free of evil and ugliness, death and destruction, calamity and casualty, injustice and oppression, suffering and adversity. But to what avail? Good consists in fighting evil and the enormous the challenge the greater the good. There were no doubt injustice and exploitation but they were not without purpose. The real test of a person is to be mighty and just, strong and merciful, intelligent and upright at the same time. The people who misused their qualities of head and heart, their power and strength, are a failure not a success in the eye of God. And mind you, though people like you bragged about justice, they were rarely interested in justice. They wanted justice only when it suited their interest. On all other occasions, they would turn their back on justice.

"As for your question," the voice continued, "why the wicked and the oppressor got away with their misdeeds, our reply is that the world that you have left behind was not meant to be a place of reckoning but a place of action. This world that you are about to be in is the place of reckoning and you'll see absolute justice done here."

"Was not the world a great drama whose script had been written well before the enactment started? Ali asked

"We know what you are driving at," the voice replied. "But as today is the day of justice, we'll answer whatever question you have so that you have no cause for complaining that you have been judged unfairly. Yes, the world was made with a purpose and it was designed to achieve that purpose. To that extent, the events in the world were pre-determined and the script, if you insist so, was pre-written. But within that determinism there was considerable freedom. To use an analogy, which we think will be interesting for you: while the actors were given their roles and they could perform only those roles, how well an actor performed the given role depended on him or her. Freedom then consisted not in choosing a role, which was always given, but in acting it out — superbly, satisfactorily, badly, or pathetically. A person was made a king and he had to be a king whether he liked it or not but whether he did justice to his role, or to put it differently, whether he was a good or bad king was up to him. So what was important was not the role *per se* but how it was performed. This is our answer to the problem of free will and determinism, which preoccupied you so thoroughly during your earthly existence."

“Forgive me, but you mean to say that a person who was poor and wretch was condemned to remain so no matter what he did and that there was nothing bad about his deplorable state!”

“As we mentioned before, the world had to have contrasts to make the struggle and freedom meaningful. Besides, such terms as poverty and wealth, weakness and strength, beauty and ugliness, wretchedness and blessedness, fortune and misfortune, scarcity and abundance, were relative. Neither of them was absolute. You were richer than some and poorer than others, fortunate on some counts and unlucky on others, and so on. The roles could change and they did. Many a slave rose to the rank of a prince and many a king ended up a prisoner. But the change of role wasn’t that important. What was important was how you responded to the change or lack of it. A person who maintained his faith and self-respect even in the face of defeat and adversity was better than whom victory and prosperity made insolent,” the voice explained.

“I don’t know whether your answer to that perennial problem is valid. Granted that I was responsible for my actions, because I had the freedom of choice. But if I was free, I had the freedom to obey or disregard divine commands. Freedom doesn’t consist in acting in a predetermined manner but in choosing the way one likes. So why am I to be punished for exercising my freedom? This to me is denial of freedom,” Ali remarked.

“Your argument is fallacious. Freedom doesn’t mean acting the way you like but acting responsibly. I give you an example. In the game of cricket that was so popular in your times, a good batsman was not one who played the way he wanted but one who played according to the situation. In life as well, while you had the freedom to play, you were supposed to play by the rules. Hence, while you were free to disregard divine commands, you were told not to do so as well as warned of its consequences. But as you disregarded divine commands, you bear the responsibility for the same.”

“You said a while ago that the world was made with a purpose. May I ask what was that purpose and has that been achieved?” Ali put another question. “Surely, condemning some of us to hell and rewarding others with the paradise hardly deserves to be a cosmic purpose.”

“Reward and punishment wasn’t the divine purpose, to be sure. It is only an expression of divine justice. God draws no pleasure in condemning His creatures to hell. In fact, it would have been better had the hell been empty. But as things stand, it’s going to be a heavily populated place. As to your question why the world was made, the answer is that the Almighty wanted to

actualize His infinite creativity. He originated life and then segregated it into different forms. He also created the worlds —plains and mountains, deserts and forests, oceans and glaciers —which these life-forms inhabited. There were challenges as well as opportunities, failure as well as success, extinctions as well as survivals, progress as well as regression. Species came into being and withered away. Civilizations were born and passed away. Nations rose and declined. Empires were built and crumbled. Cultures rose and decayed. World orders were contrived and sank into oblivion. But life continued to march unfolding the magnificent and matchless divine creativity. Doubtlessly, the Almighty had the foreknowledge of all that was going to happen since the beginning of time to this day. But it's one thing to have foreknowledge of some event and it's another to let it happen in a long series of cause and effect," the voice explained.

"Your answer brings us back to square one," Ali maintained. "For if God had foreknowledge of all events from all eternity including the final reward or punishment that all mortals would receive — and divine knowledge can't be incorrect — then the inescapable conclusion is that there was no escape from the inexorable law of causation. All was eternally settled including not only the roles but also how they would be acted out. Why then first create good performers and bad performers and afterwards reward or penalize them?"

"You are again barking up the wrong tree," the voice observed. "It's not that events took place or the people behaved in a particular way because God had their foreknowledge. To put it differently, divine knowledge was not the cause which necessitated that such and such event would take place in such and such a manner. To give a familiar example, in your times people sitting at their desk speculated purely on the basis of their knowledge and experience that the stock market would crash, which it did on occasions. But that didn't mean their forecast was the cause of the crash. Yes events could have happened otherwise. But God knew they would not because he knew all the causes and conditions governing those events. Not only that, he could intervene and change the effects of the causes to produce different results. After all, the law of causation wasn't binding on the Almighty being its Author. Divine intervention though was confined to special events."

"Again, accepted for the sake of argument. But didn't the divine intervention expose the failure of the scheme of causation established by none other than the Almighty Himself?" Ali queried.

"God could have established a perfect scheme of causation as He could have created a perfect world inhabited by perfect men and women. But then the very purpose of creation would have been lost. When everything is perfect, there's no room for change, no possibility of improvement, no scope for

progress, no need for experimentation. So the perfect world would be a static world. Needless to emphasize, creativity can hardly be exercised in such a world. Thus in a perfect world, the divine creativity wouldn't have found its full expression. That's why except the Almighty everyone and everything is well short of perfection. Everything is subject to change, decay and decadence, and permanence is an attribute of God only," the voice said emphatically.

"Now if you have nothing more to ask," the voice added after a pause, we would pronounce the divine judgment. In sum, since the debit side of your balance sheet is much larger than the credit side, you are condemned to hell."

"Please my lord, have mercy on me. I realize and confess that I was wrong and wanting in good deeds. Give me another chance," Ali bewailed.

Hearing his cries, Mrs Naqvi rushed to his room and found him sweating profusely.

"Are you ok?" she shook him.

Ali opened his eyes and to his great satisfaction realized that he was just dreaming.

"I guess you had a bad dream. What were you thinking before you went to bed?"

Ali narrated to his mother how he was thinking about death and what he had dreamt.

"I understand you have been deeply affected by your father's death. But my son death is part of life and we all have to experience the separation of those we love and adore. Have trust in God and yourself. He will give you the strength to face up to the world. People say despair in God is the ultimate sin. I would add that it's also the ultimate blunder."

Chapter 37

"I'm Babu Javed from the intelligence department," the man introduced himself to Dr Junaid.

"Yes but what possible reasons can an intelligence agent have for coming to see me?" Dr Junaid asked looking keenly at the gentleman. "Am I being considered for some high profile position in the government and need agencies' clearance for that?"

"No sir, that's not the reason that I'm here, Babu Javed replied. "I'm here because of Maulvi Zia. Please don't get surprised. I'm well familiar with the connection between you two. And you need not worry either, because I'm on your side."

"Oh that's fine! But I must say you scared me for a while. Have a seat please. May I know what precisely brings you here?" Dr Junaid asked.

"Yes of course; I'll come to that shortly but please ensure none interrupts us."

"Don't worry, I live along with an old, reliable servant. Just give me a moment."

Dr Junaid went out of the room and returned shortly. "Now we can talk freely."

"You know how Maulvi Zia narrowly escaped a drone strike. Initially the government thought he was dead but later they got the tip that he was alive and had taken refuge in a safe haven belonging to a ruling party parliamentarian."

"Yes I'm aware of that," Dr Junaid confirmed. "But I was instructed not to try to contact him. I trust he's safe and sound."

"He is all right. Probably you are unaware that security agency personnel raided the place he was hiding. But the raid was leaked and so Maulvi sahib was removed from there."

"Where's he now?"

"He is in a safer place: in the embassy of a Muslim country," Babu Javed disclosed. "Only a handful of persons know his whereabouts."

"How do you fit in the whole affair? I mean does the agency you work for also support Zia sahib or are you doing this on your own?"

“The agency-militant axis is a complex one and we needn’t go into that,” Babu Javed replied. “In the agency I work for, there’s strong support for the militants. But this is more on individual level and hasn’t much to do with the policy of the agency. I’m helping Zia sahib on the directions of none other than prime minister Malik Naseem. You must be wondering why Malik Naseem is trying to save Maulvi Zia.”

“I can guess that but to be frank what surprises me is not why Malik Naseem is supporting Zia sahib but how come a junior rank intelligence agent enjoys the confidence of the prime minister on such sensitive an issue?” Dr Junaid queried.

“I can understand this. I have been on personal terms with Malik Naseem for a long time. To cut a long story short, Malik sahib murdered a call girl when he was very young and was contesting his maiden election. At that time, I was assistant sub inspector in the police station concerned and was in the position to save or damn him. I saved him and ever since Malik sahib has been grateful to me. I have done many other things for him and he has always reciprocated. If he had his way, he would make me the head of the agency I work for. But we know that wouldn’t be good for either of us. But I remain his most trustworthy person in the entire government machinery,” Babu Javed explained.

“Malik Naseem’s confidence in you must be well deserved,” Dr Junaid noted. “Before we proceed, tell me one thing: Of late, father of one of my students, who happened to be a well known journalist, was shot dead in daylight. Do you know anything about his killers?”

“If I’m not mistaken you are alluding to Hassan Naqvi. He was also related to me — a very upright person he was. But I’m afraid I have no clue as to his murder.”

“Ok. You have updated me about Maulvi Zia. But is this all why you are here?”

“Maulvi Zia wants to meet you and I have been tasked with arranging the meeting. Now listen carefully.”

Babu Javed whispered some instructions into Dr Junaid’s ears.

“Yes tomorrow we’ll leave.”

Ali accepted the advice of his mother and sought, yet another time, to establish his faith in God.

"I'm aware that it's difficult to prove the existence of God empirically or rationally. But empirically and rationally, denial of the existence of God is not a necessity either. In fact, the existence of God can neither be proved nor disproved by traditional arguments. So the grounds for the existence of God should rest elsewhere. Why not the pragmatic ground? In philosophy I have read about several tests of truth and one of these is pragmatic test. And no truth is more important than that of God's existence," Ali argued with himself.

"I should start by reposing my faith in God and then see what effects it produces on myself. If the belief works and makes me more courageous, more responsible and mentally and emotionally more stable, then it means God exists. If the consequences are otherwise, then I may infer that God doesn't exist. So let's start with the assumption that God exists," Ali made up his mind.

"Now if God exists, then His will must be the dominant power in the world. Every event and every incident must be an expression of the divine will. If God is with me, nothing can harm me. Honors and disgrace, success and failure, elevation and humiliation, life and death are in the hands of God only. Everything that happens is part of the divine scheme. Therefore, I must submit myself to the divine will and accept whatever destiny has in store for me."

The medicine started working for Ali. He grew in confidence and became more relaxed and composed in temperament. At times, his skepticism would raise his head but he successfully curbed it. He felt tremendously indebted to his mother, who had shown him the right path.

Having gained in confidence and composure, Ali decided he should plan his future. "Success and failure being in the hands of God, all one should do was to make the right effort leaving the consequences to God," Ali inferred.

The faith in God also solved for him the problem of freedom and determinism. Freedom, he thought, consisted in striving and not achieving, acting and not attaining. Achievement and attainment were beyond human power and belonged to the sphere of the divine will. One should do one's best without trying to be perfect as perfection was an attribute of God only.

With a new-found faith in himself and God, Ali's view of social relationships also started changing. His doomed marriage with Sara had turned him into a cynic suspecting that social intercourse was merely a device to seek one's benefits without regard to those of others. But as his outlook on life became

broader, he realized that it wasn't appropriate to tar all relationships and all people with the same brush. People were actuated by a complex set of motives — love and fear, good-will and malice, altruism and egoism. One should try to understand people and their motives without trying to change them. Even the most heartless person had a soft corner for someone. Even the most selfish person cared for some.

Farzana frequently visited Ali's home and his attitude towards her also underwent a change. Contrary to the past, Farzana's arrival didn't unnerve Ali. He knew she had not lost interest in him and he accepted that. "We may become one if God has ordained so. I needn't worry about that." He disposed of the matter in that fashion.

Ali, however, still didn't find himself attracted to Farzana. He had still a lot of place for Sara in his heart and he had no hesitation about admitting that to himself. "What Sara did to me was God's will and she must have some good reasons for that."

Both Mrs Naqvi and Farzana noted with satisfaction the change wrought in Ali. The former in particular knew that his son had suffered a lot and deserved a better and happier life.

Ali had been offered a place in his father's newspaper but both mother and son decided he should pursue a career in the civil service, which was a very promising option. Ali thus started preparing for the civil service examination in all earnestness. But little did he know that his serenity was doomed to be short-lived.

Chapter 38

One morning, Ali was looking for his domicile as he had to file an application for the civil service exam. He searched for the same in his room but couldn't find it.

"Maybe mother knows where the domicile is."

As his mother had gone to work, he thought he should look for the piece of paper in her room. So he went to her room. He knew his mother had placed all the important documents in a cabinet. The cabinet was locked but Ali knew where his mother kept the key. He had never opened his mother's cabinet before. So he hesitated for a moment but then realized that he had to find the domicile, because that was the last day for the submission of the application. He unlocked the cabinet and sifted the papers but couldn't find the domicile. "Where the hell can it be?" he wondered.

There was another cabinet in the room and Ali ransacked that as well. But the domicile wasn't there either. As he was about to slam the cabinet shut, he saw a descript folder lying in a corner. He opened the folder and started scanning the papers therein. The folder belonged to his late father and contained his academic testimonials. Then there was a copy of his parent's marriage certificate. At the end of the folder was a folded piece of paper. Out of curiosity, Ali opened it and what he saw there struck him the heaviest blow of his life. It was a one page medical report of Mr Naqvi stating that he was incapable of fathering a child.

"What's this! My father was incapable of fathering a child? Then who I'm? Am I not his son? Is my mother not my mother? Or am I a bastard? No, neither can be true. Maybe the report is not correct. Maybe father had some problem but later he got himself cured. I know medical reports are not invariably correct. After all they are made by men and human judgment is not infallible," Ali tried to reassure himself against the authenticity of the shocking disclosure.

Ali completely forgot that he was looking for his domicile and that he had to submit the application that very day. For next three hours, he thought only about the medical report trying hopelessly to reassure himself that the document was erroneous. And then his mother came back.

Mrs Naqvi saw Ali in a hysteric condition. "What's it my son? You seem to be extremely upset."

Ali kept silent and handed her over the medical certificate.

“Where did you find it,” a crestfallen Mrs Naqvi asked?

“This is all nonsense. Isn’t it?” Ali gasped ignoring her question. ‘I’m your son.”

“Of course you are my son and your late father’s. But I’m afraid this report is correct?” Mrs Naqvi dropped the bombshell.

“What! The person I called my father wasn’t mine. Then who I’m?”

“My son what I’m going to disclose,” Mrs Naqvi began, “you have to bear with utmost fortitude. We brought you up but we aren’t your biological parents. After two years of our marriage, there wasn’t any sign of me bearing a child. We both had ourselves examined and it transpired that your father, the nicest person I have ever seen, had that one deficiency — that he was incapable of fathering a child. So we decided to adopt a child and adopted you and brought you up with all the love and attention that we were capable of. Hassan always wanted that we should tell you the truth. But events took such a shape that the opportune moment that we were waiting for never came.”

“Who are my real parents?”

“We are your real parents. I’m your mother and Hassan was your father. Yes, we aren’t your biological parents but does it matter? No it doesn’t.”

“This is no answer to my question.”

“Ok if you want to know, we took you from an orphanage. But my son there’s no use making such queries. Don’t think about the distant past. Think about the present and the bright future that lies ahead of you.”

“Future! One who doesn’t have a past doesn’t have a future. Who I’m? A rootless person, who has no idea where he has come from, what is his religion or ethnic identity, who and where are his parents, who and where is his family?”

“For God’s sake I’m your family. My identity is your identity. After your father, you are everything to me and I don’t need anyone else. I know you are shocked. Anyone would be. May God help you overcome this!” said a dejected Mrs Naqvi.

For Ali the revelation that he was rootless proved the proverbial final straw that broke the camel's back. The whole edifice of his new-found faith in God and the world fell apart.

"Is there anyone in the world who I can trust? Even the people whom I loved and trusted beyond doubt lied to me all their life. They didn't and couldn't have a child and therefore used me to satisfy their parent instinct and to avoid the ignominy that they couldn't bear a child. Why? They had all the time to tell me the truth but they preferred to keep silent. I thought whatever God does has some meaning and purpose. But what's meaning and purpose in my being rootless and without identity?"

Ali thought himself to be in a hopeless situation. "What's the point in planning and striving to achieve my goal when I am doomed to failure, disappointment and humiliation?"

He completely lost heart, said good-bye to his plans to make a career for himself and left himself completely to circumstances. He painfully felt he had no family, no friend, no religion, no identity, no past, no future; his life had no meaning, no purpose. He was completely alone. His mother tried to help him but in vain. He took to drugs and most of the time he was in a state of slumber. When awake, he was incessantly tormented by the thoughts of being completely alone in the world. He became careless about his appearance. Farzana noted his state with pain and wondered what had gone wrong with him — Mrs Naqvi hadn't shared that secret with anyone else. The young woman spoke to Ali but felt she was talking to a dead man.

In the meantime, Ali's final result was announced and he completed his masters. But that news made no effect on him. When his mother congratulated him, his reply was that for a dead man success or failure didn't matter.

One evening while he was just wandering, Ali came across Dr Junaid. The professor was much surprised to see him like that and drove him to his house. On Dr Junaid's insistence, Ali gave him a complete account of his predicament.

The professor listened to him sympathetically and then began: "Throughout your life you have been taken for a ride by others, who exploited your credulity and simplicity. But this isn't surprising, because that's how the world goes. So if you don't trust anyone anymore, you're absolutely justified in doing this. But what I don't understand is why you are punishing yourself for the wrong that others have done you."

"But then what should I do?"

“Revenge upon the people who have wronged you. Revenge upon this cruel, insensitive, unjust society,” Dr Junaid exhorted Ali.

“I and revenge! No sir I’m not capable of doing anything.”

“This is where you are mistaken,” observed the professor. “You are young, intelligent, energetic and above all have anger and hatred for the world. You know anger and hatred are among the greatest assets of a person that can pull down empires and ravage societies. The only problem is how to use them intelligently. In your case, your anger and hatred are directed towards yourself, which is ruining you rather than your enemies. Just think about that and then get back to me.”

Dr Junaid talked to Ali for another two hours. He gave him several examples of how heroic individuals beaten and battered by their own people had brought the entire society to its knees. As Ali was about to leave, Dr Junaid gave him a book.

“What is this?” Ali asked.

“This is one of my favorite books. It is also the holy book of the followers of a great religion and conveys one of the profoundest moral lessons of all times,” Dr Junaid explained. “Read it carefully and tell me what you make of it independent of its narrow religious significance.”

“Ok. These days I’m not inclined to read anything. I just sleep or chew the cud but I’ll try to go through this.”

Ali came back home and started considering Dr Junaid’s advice. The more he pondered, the more he realized the wisdom in the professors’ words. He also recalled Sara’s words in their last encounter in the philosophy department when she had told him that there were two kinds of people: those who won and those who lost.

“Why am I always the loser?” Is it the will of God? No. The reason is that I’m weak, naïve and credulous enough to always end up on the losing side. I don’t fight for my rights. But now I will,” Ali resolved.

Having made up his mind Ali went back to Dr Junaid.

“So you’re back.” The professor gazed at his student. “I guess my advice has made some impression on you.”

Ali replied in the affirmative.

“By the way, do you know why Sara married you and then ditched you?”

“No sir, I’m don’t.”

“I tell you why.” And then much to Ali’s amazement, Dr Junaid told him that a big gun wanted to marry Sara against her will and to avoid that she married him. The professor however concealed that the big gun was Maulvi Zia.

“Oh! Here we are! She never loved me; she only made a pretension of that. But how do you know this?”

“That I’ll tell you some other time. But if you insist, I can share that with you right now.”

“It’s all right sir. This is not much important for me. What’s more important for me is why she did that to me and even more how I can settle my score with her.”

“That’s splendid! You’ll get the opportunity to settle your score with everyone who has wronged you. But you must feel the right amount of anger and hatred for these people and also learn to use these emotions intelligently. Remember, acting rashly is as bad as failing to act,” Dr Junaid advised his student.

Ali responded with a nod.

“Did you read the book I gave you?”

Ali replied in the negative.

“It’s all right. Read it at leisure but do read it. It will be of tremendous help to you. Have you told anyone about our meetings?” Dr Junaid asked.

“I hardly speak to anyone else these days.”

“Ok. That’s very important. I don’t want others to know that I’m coaching you. You know people just…”

“Sir don’t worry. I’m not going to talk about this to anyone,” Ali assured the professor.

“You must be wondering why I want to help you — and rightly so,” Dr Junaid

noted. “You were never among my favorite students. But my dear, there’s something common between us two. In my younger days I was much like you — nervous, shaky and uncertain — and incidentally I was also ditched by a girl. I never married, because having once been beaten by a woman, I was forever shy. I mean I lost all trust in the species called woman. I was even on the point of committing suicide. But then one person rescued me from the abyss in which I had fallen. And when I asked him how I could repay him my debt, you know what his reply was. He told me just help someone else in your predicament.

“Dear the point,” the professor continued, “that I wish to make is that there are good people as well as bad people, though the former category is easily outnumbered by the latter. Our mission in life should be to fight for the good people and fight against the bad people. I trust you agree with me.”

“Yes sir I’m in all agreement with you and I feel sorry that you also suffered in your life.”

“Suffering is part of life my dear student,” Dr Junaid said. “Suffering is even good, provided it makes you strong and goads you into fighting for a noble cause. However, God hasn’t condemned people to suffer. Much of the suffering that you see in the world is man-made created by the lust for wealth and power. It’s this lust that’s the real devil inside us and also finds its outward expression in the oppressive and unjust socio-economic systems. One such system also exists in our society.
“You know there’s so much injustice in our society. Our democracy has actually degenerated into a tyranny. The more wealth you have, the more votes you bag in elections. The more votes you bag, the more powerful you become. The more powerful you are, the wealthier you get and so on. That’s why you see in our society the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. It’s one class that has ruled the roost during last sixty years. Members of this class occupy all the important places everywhere: in politics and business, industry and agriculture, civil and military bureaucracy, media and civil society. Even the so-called intellectuals that we boast of are predominantly drawn from this ruling class.

“Just tell me does anyone who matters in our society call for a real change? No, they all seek to preserve the status quo. ‘Save the system,’ they all insist. But which system should we save? This system, that has lost all its credibility and effectiveness? This system, which takes away from those who have little and gives it to those who already have a plenty? No. This system has to go and young people like you who have so much against it must be the agent of change.”

Dr Junaid's words made a great impression on Ali's impressionable mind. He had seldom thought beyond himself. He had been concerned mainly about resolving his own contradictions. But Dr Junaid told him that one could not resolve one's contradictions without resolving those of society.

"So why not resolve the contradictions inherent in society," Ali thought.

"Sir, how can we effect a meaningful change in society," Ali asked Dr Junaid in their next sitting.

"It's good to see you are thinking beyond yourself," Dr Junaid appreciated Ali's question. "This is the real sign of the maturity of a person when he starts thinking about changing his society. Coming to your question, people talk about two ways of change: evolutionary and revolutionary. But in my view, there's only one way of change — if by change we don't mean mere transition but transformation — and that's revolutionary. Never in history have a people transformed themselves by following the evolutionary path. The reason is that the status quo, like the vicious cycle of poverty and backwardness, can only be dismantled by a strong big push, which is only the result of a well thought-out conscious campaign. As a matter of fact, those who insist on evolutionary change don't want meaningful change at all. They only want peripheral changes so that their privileged position remains unchanged. This is what our leaders and opinion makers clamor for. Those who stand for the real change or transformation are dubbed miscreants, foreign agents, conspirators, traitors and terrorists." Dr Junaid stressed the last word.

"Forgive me, but do you mean that the terrorists are actually revolutionary?"

"My dear it's is just the use of words. Those we approve of, we hail as heroes and freedom fighters; those we disapprove of we stigmatize as miscreants and terrorists."

"But sir these terrorists kill innocent persons. They have turned our society into a hell. They are the agents of disorder and anarchy, of mayhem and chaos. Aren't they? Ali queried.

Dr Junaid looked askance at the young man and remarked, "This is the language of the status quo and reflects on the poverty of a society which is not yet prepared to accept those who are out to dismantle its basic fabric, which is rotten to the core. Yes innocent people are killed in bomb blasts but this is the unavoidable price that we have to pay to purge society of its evils and vices. Remember, the people have to make contributions if there's to be a revolution, some by killing, and others by being killed. There's no such thing as a bloodless revolution. Yes people talk of the bloodless revolution in

England in the 17th century, but do you know how much blood was shed before the advent of that revolution?

"As for the disorder and anarchy, this is the inescapable destiny of a society characterized by gross injustices and inequalities. The social order can't be dismantled unless all its evils and vices are exposed. And do you think the present system is not killing the people? It's also killing them in its own way. It's giving people slow death, which is far more painful than what the terrorists are giving them. I see you aren't convinced and this is hardly surprising as common prejudices, like old habits, die hard," Dr Junaid stated in an emotionally charged tone.

"You have really touched my heart sir but you're right: I'll need some time to overcome my prejudices. There's one question that has troubled me most — and that's the problem of freedom and determinism. Would you be kind enough to share with me how you look at it?"

"Why not. I'm here to help resolve all your intellectual problems. But remember one thing. As I advised you earlier, don't try to resolve these philosophical problems for their own sake. Since philosophy is essentially a social enterprise, solution to such problems must be related to social change."

Dr Junaid took a glass of water and then continued, "To begin with, I don't take freedom in an abstract sense. Rather I look at it in a concrete sense. Some thinkers say that freedom is essentially a matter of consciousness and that you are free if you think yourself to be free. But I believe this is an aristocratic and abstract concept of freedom. Mere affirmation of freedom doesn't make you free. A prisoner can't come out of his cage by believing that he is free. If he wants to be at liberty, he should either get himself acquitted or simply break the prison. Freedom then is power. The more powerful you are, the freer you are. And power is the ability to exercise control not only on others but also on oneself. People are free to the extent they can influence others as well as their own actions. If my actions are dictated by others, I'm not in the least free. If I'm the master of my own actions, I'm free. God being omnipotent is absolutely free. We the mortals falling well short of being omnipotent are relatively free. You may be freer tomorrow than today and even freer day after tomorrow. But as I said earlier, you can't be free merely by thinking yourself to be free. This is delusion rather than freedom. I hope this will satisfy you."

"Yes of course. One last question before I take leave of you. How can we relate freedom to society?"

"Well it's very simple. Every society has its own free people and freedom is

thus an aspect of culture. In the slave society, only the master is free. In the feudal society, only the feudal lord is free. In a capitalist society, only the capitalist is free. In a hierarchal society like ours, only people at the upper echelons are free. By contrast, in an egalitarian society all are free, of course not entirely equally. We must use our freedom for creating a just and egalitarian society."

Chapter 39

"We are going to have a new recruit for our cause," Dr Junaid told Maulvi Zia.

"Oh really! Who's the lucky on?"

"He's no stranger to you. His name is Ali Naqvi, if you remember."

"Yes of course. How can I forget him? He stole one of my prized objects."

"He didn't steal it. He himself was trapped."

"You're right. But how did you catch him?"

"He met me few weeks back dejected and shaken having no reason why he should live anymore. The people he thought to be his parents turned out to be merely his foster parents and he himself a bastard, I suppose. It wasn't much difficult for me to draw up some similarities with him and impress upon him that his life had not lost all its meaning and purpose and that he should live for a cause," Dr Junaid explained.

"Do you think he can be of use to us? Maulvi Zia asked him."

"Very much. I haven't yet told him about our cause but I think time has come to invite him to join our movement. He'll not refuse."

"Well then sooner the better. Is this all you wanted to speak to me about?"

"There are few other things. But if you are in hurry, some other time."

"Actually I have to appear in the court tomorrow to extend my bail and I have got to see my lawyer now," Maulvi Zia told Dr Junaid. "I'll call you later."

"Very well. I hope you wouldn't have any problem in the court tomorrow."

"Certainly not. The judge is no stranger to our cause." Maulvi Zia winked at his comrade."

Dr Junaid decided it was time he told Ali about himself and the movement he was part of. The professor was confident he was in full control of his pupil's mind. So when in the evening Ali came to see him, Dr Junaid asked him, "What you make of what I have so far told you?"

“Sir all my life I have lived on wrong assumptions about myself and the world. There was none to correct those assumptions. But sir you, true to a teacher, have shown me the real picture of the world and my place in it. I have reached the conclusion that strength is among the greatest of virtues and that if I’m not strong I’m good for nothing. But one must use one’s strength to achieve some impersonal purpose, to live and die for a cause.”

“Excellent! Are you prepared to live and die for a cause?”

“Why not sir. I have hitherto lived only for myself and what did I get? A life full of failure and dejection, a life devoid of all meaning and purpose. Now I want to live beyond myself,” Ali said in an energetic tone.

“Splendid. The noblest life is that of a hero; the most honorable death is that of a martyr. A hero is one who lives for others; a martyr is one who dies for others. The best cause is that which makes people live and die for others. Do you want to join such a cause?” Dr Junaid asked him.

“With all my heart and soul,” Ali assented.

“I appreciate this,” said Dr Junaid. “Before we go into details, remember one thing: you will not step back. Your commitment must be once and for all.”

“You have my word sir. I’ll not flinch from my commitment,” Ali pledged.

“Then listen. I told you the other day that I owe my life and everything that I have to one person. You know who he is? He is Maulvi Ziaur Rehman.”

“Maulvi Zia! The well-known religious leader, the one who is said to be the patron-in-chief of terrorists?”

“Yes the same Maulvi Zia. The man who has dedicated his life to effecting a metamorphosis in society, the man who is committed to establishing a just and egalitarian system, where people will live with honor and self respect and in fear of God only. If working for such society is terrorism, then yes Maulvi Zia is the patron-in-chief of terrorists,” Dr Junaid said in a voice choked with emotions.

“Forgive me sir I didn’t mean it. I was just quoting the popular view about him,” an abashed Ali apologized to Dr Junaid.

“It’s all right. People even fail to recognize, much less honor, their benefactors and stigmatize them as miscreants and culprits, traitors and terrorists. This is because the masses by and large are naïve, conservative and

coward. They would bear intolerable suffering but wouldn't rise against its perpetrators. They would rather live in disgrace than die with honor. But eventually they must come to the realization that it is better to be a martyr than to be a coward, that honorable death is preferable to a wretched life."

"Pardon me sir, but I have also heard that Maulvi Zia's network kidnaps people for ransom, blackmails and extorts money from them. Sara, my ex-wife, told me that her father was one of the victims of Maulvi Zia." Ali raised another question.

"There's no need to beg pardon. You must clear all your doubts before you enter our movement for our world has no room for skepticism. It's wholly made of faith," Dr Junaid responded in a crisp tone. "Yes, we kidnap and extort money. But why? That's important. Unlike politicians, we don't this to fill our own pockets or to swell our bank accounts but to keep our movement alive and kicking. Without money, no movement can be sustained even for a single day. And look at the people we extort money from — the big businessmen like Seth Nisar and corrupt politicians, who plunder the public wealth and who pay in taxes even less than that paid by my peon. These people have no qualms about abusing girls just about the age of their daughters. It may be a crime to extort money from these thugs, because law is made and unmade by them in their own interest. But it's not a sin. Rather it's an act of virtue. And do you know how did we net Seth Nisar?"

And then Dr Junaid gave Ali a brief account of how they had trapped Seth Nisar. As he finished, he remarked, "And look at his daughter — just like his father a ruthless, heartless person, who lives only for herself and uses innocent people like you. Do you think it's wrong to take away from these filthy rich and give it to those who most deserve it?"

"Certainly not sir. Such people deserve worse treatment," Ali agreed with his mentor.

"Yes, they need to be given worse treatment. But how? Not merely by killing them, because they will be replaced by their scions, who are even more ruthless. The cure consists in uprooting the system from which these people draw strength and sustenance. And the system can't be uprooted by the so-called constitutional, legal means, because no system provides for its own demise. We have to resort to other means."

"I fully understand and endorse your views. We should leave no stone unturned in demolishing this system. And for this I'm with you in life and in death," Ali assured Dr Junaid.

“This is like my disciple! Let me hug you and congratulate you on embarking on a new life,” Dr Junaid chuckled.

Chapter 40

Every evening, Ali visited Dr Junaid and they spent an hour or so together. The professor would endeavor to strengthen his new recruit's faith in their cause and answer any questions he might have.

Dr Junaid knew well that Ali was impressionable and shaky. Such people are remarkable for their lack of consistency and perseverance. They are easy to influence but difficult to keep under influence for long, because God knows when they will come in thrall of some other doctrine or person. Therefore, Dr Junaid took upon himself to ensure that his student didn't get off the hook.

One question that troubled Ali from the beginning was why did a westernized and secular Dr Junaid side with the religious people, who aimed at establishing a theocracy. If he wanted to change the system, he should have joined people like him in thought and lifestyle.

When asked, the professor's response was this: "I'm glad you put this question. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was secular and westernized but he ended up having India divided on the basis of religion. Why? Did he want to set up a religious state? Certainly not. But he knew well that India could be bifurcated only on the basis of religion. No other basis would be a workable proposition. In our society as well, if any real change is to come through, the same must be in the name of religion. The people wouldn't accept any change based on socialism, secularism, liberalism, etc. Besides, the clergy are the only well-organized force, who want a real change in society. We have leftists, some of them of brilliant intellect, but they don't want any meaningful change. Their socialism starts with their sense of personal deprivation and ends with their personal fulfillment. In the past, their personal fulfillment was promised by socialist ideals but after the demise of socialism in Eastern Europe, these people have taken refuge under the umbrella of civil society, which is an instrument of capitalism. These leftists, secularists only flirt with the revolution. I see no point in joining such faithless people."

"But sir would the establishment of a theocratic, monolithic society be palatable to you — just like the one the Taliban had established in Afghanistan?"

"Pakistan is not Afghanistan. We are a far more advanced and diversified society; so if the Taliban come into power, they will definitely tone down their philosophy. I know this like the back of my hand."

"Does Maulvi Zia share your views?"

"To a great extent. He is a clergy but an enlightened one, if I may use this term. Like me, he was educated in the West and admits that a primitive interpretation of Islam can hardly work in our society."

"Among Muslims we have Shias and Sunnis, Brelvis and Deobandis and Wahabis. If an Islamic state is established, what will be its creed? Ali queried.

"Yes that's a common objection when it comes to setting up an Islamic state. The answer is that the creed of the government will be that of the majority. Just as in the post Islamic revolution neighboring Iran, the creed of the state is that of the Shias, who are in majority. Besides, the differences among sects are not that enormous or fundamental. The important question however is not which creed or sect will rule but whether the system will change for the better. I'm willing to pay my allegiance to anyone who is committed to real transformation of society. To me it doesn't matter at all whether he is clean-shaven or wears a beard; is a civilian or a man in uniform; is a man of the world or a man of religion; has a puritanical or permissive outlook; speaks English or Urdu or Arabic; is dressed immaculately or shabbily; smokes cigarette, pipe or cigar; is an alcoholic or a total abstainer; was educated at Harvard, or Oxford, or in a village seminary," Dr Junaid responded.

Ali was used to staying at home most of the time. However, Mrs Naqvi had noticed that for last few weeks he would regularly go out in the evening for considerable time. She knew he had no friends and no hobby.

"So where does he go?" she wondered. "Maybe he goes to library but I haven't seen him leave home, or return, with books."

She wanted to ask Ali but thought that might offend him. Ever since he came to know about his parenthood, Ali had virtually stopped talking to her. By the time he woke up, Mrs Naqvi had gone to college. They met at lunch and dinner but Ali would finish his meal quickly without uttering a word. He even didn't ask her for money, though she would put some money on his study table regularly.

Mrs Naqvi had lost her husband and feared she might lose her son as well. Though she had not given birth to Ali, she had brought him up and loved him intensely. After the demise of her spouse, he was everything to her and she couldn't afford to lose him.

One evening at dinner she said to Ali, "Dear we need to talk."

Ali didn't answer.

"I know you're still cross with me and no doubt have a cause for being so. But, my son, this shouldn't make you neglect yourself. If you don't think about me, it's all right but do think about yourself. You wanted to appear in the civil service examination but you didn't submit the application. Never mind. You can appear next year. The important thing is to think positively and make the right effort."

"If you don't want me to stay here, I'll just leave. But please, for God's sake, no more advice. I know what I should do. Don't I?" Ali responded rather insolently.

"Ali you got me wrong. I have all the faith in your abilities. I just wanted you to —."

Before Mrs Naqvi could complete, Ali rose angrily and shut him up in the room leaving her in tears.

After some time when he cooled down Ali realized that he had been unfair to his mother.

"She was just concerned about me."

But next moment he thought, "Has she not been unfair to me? Has she not lied to me throughout my life? But why I'm thinking about this? I have a mission to accomplish and I should think only about that. And when one has a mission to accomplish, one shouldn't give importance to personal relationships. These relationships in fact weaken one's resolve and, as Dr Junaid says, I have got to be strong and adamant. What if she were my real mother? Would that in any way affect my mission?"

While Ali was preoccupied with these questions he heard a familiar voice. Next moment his mother knocked at the door and announced that Sara had come to see him.

"You must be surprised at my arrival. But I'm leaving abroad day after tomorrow and just wanted to say good-bye to you," Sara said to Ali after Mrs Naqvi had left the room.

"You bade me good-bye several months ago," Ali said tauntingly.

"You are still annoyed with me. I wouldn't repeat what I told you during our last encounter as I see you're still where I left you."

“Is this all you came for?”

“No I wanted to condole the death of uncle Naqvi. I should have come earlier but you know —.”

“Thanks for the condolence,” Ali cut her short.

“You know who killed your father?” Sara threw an unexpected question.

“No I don’t. But do you?” Ali asked sarcastically.

“Yes. Maulvi Zia, Sara dropped the bombshell.”

“What! Why in the world would he kill my father and how in the world do you know this?”

“Your father was doing a story on the militants and wanted to expose something terrible about them enough to convict Maulvi Zia in the court of law. So he had him eliminated. My father told me this.”

“But your father has links with the militants. Why would he divulge such confidential information?”

“This is a long story, which I hardly have the time to narrate to you.”

“But why should I believe you, especially having been duped and dumped by you?”

“It’s for you to decide,” Sara replied calmly. “I told you what I knew. But it’s good to see you’re looking confident and self-assured. Best of luck.” With those words, Sara stepped out.

Chapter 41

"Sir Sara visited me last evening and told me something strange." Ali said to Dr Junaid

"Yes. What's that?" Dr Junaid asked curiously.

"She told me that Maulvi Zia was behind my father's murder, because he had some evidence which could convict him."

"This is sheer nonsense," the professor responded sharply. "No one knows Maulvi Zia better than I. He doesn't kill innocent people. He even spared Seth Nisar and Sara. Besides, he has been on excellent terms with journalists and your father was a widely respected journalist."

Ali was taken aback by the remarks about Sara and her father.

"You said Maulvi Zia spared Seth Nisar and Sara. I don't understand this. If I'm not mistaken, Seth Nisar is associated with Zia," he asked.

Dr Junaid realized that he had made an indiscreet statement but felt that he mustn't conceal the truth from Ali.

"Very well. It's time you knew the truth. I once told you that Sara married you under duress. The reason was Maulvi Zia. It was he who wanted to marry Sara and to avoid that she married you."

"I see! So it was Maulvi Zia. But why did he want to marry Sara against her will? This runs counter to the picture of Maulvi Zia that you have sketched."

"Well, Maulvi Zia had taken to Sara and proposed to enter into wedlock with her and I don't see anything wrong in that. But he didn't want a forced marriage. If that were the case, no one could have stopped him. However, Seth Nisar thought otherwise and so the father and the daughter planned to use you. But when the news of Maulvi Zia's death spread, they had the marriage dissolved, because the threat perception that formed the basis of your marriage had ceased to exist. Sara is a most wily woman. She wants you to revenge upon Maulvi Zia for having what she alleges murdered your father. In this way, she has tried to kill two birds with one stone," Dr Junaid explained looking deeply into Ali. "Besides, do you think that woman can be trusted after all she did to you?"

"I guess you're right. Sara has no credibility in my eye." Ali said what the

professor wanted to hear. “She also told me that she was leaving abroad tomorrow.”

“Then this makes my explanation even more plausible.”

Ali assented with a nod.

“Let’s speak no more of this and talk about our mission. I trust you haven’t told anyone about us.”

“You already have my word sir.”

“And I trust you’ll be as good as your word. As I told you earlier, the members of our movement must be strong and tough physically and mentally. That’s why we give a lot of importance to the grooming of our soldiers. While here I can teach you theory, in order to assimilate our culture, you must undergo the necessary training. Are you ready?” Dr Junaid asked Ali.

“Yes sir. Whatever you say. Where would I be trained and for how long?” Ali enquired.

“We have a training academy in the northern part of the country, where you’ll stay for nearly two months. Remember, for us learning is a life-long process and the training in the academy is a basic one — just like an orientation course”— the professor said.

“When would the training start?”

“In three days. You’ll make it I trust?”

“Of course sir. The only problem is the woman who still insists she’s my mother. What should I tell her?”

“Just tell her that you have got a job in an NGO project. If you want, we can arrange an appointment letter for you. However, during your stay in the academy, you wouldn’t contact her. No calls, no SMS, no letters.”

“I understand sir.”

“Ok. Then go home and come back in the evening day after tomorrow. You’ll leave late night.”

Ali reached Peshawar by train early in the morning. From the railway station

he was taken in a car to a village about fifty miles away. There he was lodged in a small house and at sunset was blind-folded and pushed into a jeep driven by a bearded man. He was told not to ask any questions. After a few hours journey, the jeep entered a big old-fashioned building. Ali, whose blinds were now removed, was received by another bearded man and taken inside the building.

"So this is the training academy," he muttered to himself. He wanted to confirm this from the bearded man but he didn't reply to Ali's query.

They entered a hall having no furniture but a rugged carpet. Ali's throat was dry with thirst and he asked for water. But the man only signaled him to sit and left the place. In quarter of an hour, a stout middle-aged man appeared.

"Welcome," the man said. "My name is Nasir Khan and I'm second in command here. Let me first congratulate you on joining our movement. We need young educated people like you to take our cause forward. Dr sahib speaks highly of you and I hope you'll prove an asset for us."

The man paused for a moment and then resumed, "I know you're worn out after a long, tedious journey but we are waging a *jihad* and *jihad* means incessant struggle with little rest. You are here for two months and your training will begin tomorrow. I just want to share a few things with you about the academy. First, as you have already been told, on no account you'll be allowed to leave these premises; nor will you try to make contacts with your family or friends in any manner. Second, there is no newspaper, no television, no radio, no Internet here, so that you are completely cut off from the outside world and wholly concentrate on your training. Three, life here is very hard and you'll be kept preoccupied from dawn to dusk. Food is scarce and of ordinary quality and you'll be required to do all your daily chores yourself. Four, you'll follow the instructions in letter and spirit. We have zero tolerance for non-compliance. Finally, remember that your career after the training depends heavily on your performance here. So make the best use of this opportunity. Do you have any question?"

"I just want a glass of water," Ali almost cried.

"Oh. You must be hungry as well. If you have nothing else to ask, I'll leave. You'll be provided your meal shortly."

The majority of students in the academy were between the age of twelve and twenty and most of them came of poor families. There were quite a few foreigners as well hailing from both the East and the West. The students were

of two categories: those who were sparsely educated or had never received any formal education at all, and those like Ali who were well educated and came of the middle class. The two types of students were trained separately, because their training needs were different. Ali surmised that the students falling in the first category were trained to be workers — the future fighters or suicide bombers — while those in the second category were trained to be leaders and planners of the militancy.

In the workers' training, the emphasis was on martial drills, while for the leaders the training focused on planning militant activities, oratory and the theory of *jihad*. The theory in a nutshell was this:

The world presented a spectacle of incessant struggle between Islam and kufr. The conflict had intensified with the passage of time and the forces of kufr were out to annihilate Islam. Everywhere Muslims were being prosecuted. The anti-Islam forces feared the rise of an Islamic state and therefore they were bent upon preventing its rise. The rulers in Muslim countries knew well that the rise of an Islamic state with its emphasis on justice, equality and equitable distribution of resources would strike at their privileged position and therefore they had joined hands with the evil forces.

The governments in Muslim countries had become a puppet in the hands of anti-Islam forces and were promoting their masters' agenda. The anti-Islam forces were out to obliterate Islamic culture and values in the name of freedom of expression, human rights and fundamental liberties. They were using their enormous wealth, as well as those of Muslim countries, their sophisticated technology, immense media power and tremendous military strength against Islam.

Therefore, it was the duty of every Muslim to fight the evil forces to frustrate their nefarious designs. The war had to be fought on all fronts: political, economic, cultural, ideological and military. However, that war couldn't be won unless un-Islamic regimes in Muslim countries were dethroned and Islamic governments installed, because that would allow Muslims to use their enormous resources for the defense and propagation of their religion.

By the grace of God, Pakistan was chosen to be the centre of Muslim unity. Pakistan was the only ideological state created for the propagation of Islam. However, successive governments in Pakistan also succumbed to western pressure and disregarded the objective of the creation of the country. Instead of Islamisation, the society was westernized, secularized and vulgarized. It became a hotbed of corruption, obscenity, and injustice. Then a great servant of Islam took over the reins of powers and started Islamisation of society. His regime was the golden era of Pakistan. That great ruler also spearheaded the

Muslim resistance against the advance of communism and forced the demise of the great evil system. Apprehensive of his unflinching resolve to spread Islam, the anti-Islam forces conspired against him and killed him. After his death, the country returned to the age of obscenity and secularism.

But God gave Muslims another opportunity with the rise of the Taliban, who in a short time set up an Islamic government in Afghanistan. However, the anti-Islam forces joined hands to topple that government in which the government in Pakistan played a key role. Since then the government in Pakistan has been a stooge of the West in its onslaught on Islam. However, the mujahideen are determined to take the fight to its logical end, which of course is the victory of Islam and establishment of an Islamic caliphate to which Muslims everywhere would owe allegiance and thus the dream of Muslim unity would come true.

The key to this victory is the Islamisation of Pakistan and this is not possible unless the country is purged of western influence. Since the mujahideen are vastly outnumbered and out resourced, they can't wage and win the conventional war. Their most potent weapon is suicide attacks, which would force the government to change its policies and come to terms with the mujahideen. The suicide attacks are aimed not at ordinary people but at the state apparatus, which is at the service of anti-Islam forces. True, sometimes innocent people also perish in such attacks but then this is the price the society will have to pay for the noble cause. Besides, such people are martyrs and will be rewarded with an everlasting life of perfect bliss and happiness in the hereafter.

In a few days, Ali had realized that he, like other trainees, was being indoctrinated. The same message was repeated every day. Questions were discouraged and everything was related to the will of God. There were twenty people in the 'class' and a quarter of them were foreigners. The trainees had at least three things in common: One, none of them had joined what was called the Islamic revolutionary movement out of poverty or having been a victim of social injustice. In fact, some of the trainees came of enormously wealthy and influential families for whom the world was up for grabs. Two, they were all well educated. Three, all of them were solitary figures and had been unable to establish normal relationships with the people around them. They were, so to speak, free of customary family ties. It was hardly surprising therefore that none of those solitary figures could develop personal relationships with each other during their stay in the academy.

Chapter 42

It was one month since Ali had left and Mrs Naqvi had not received any news of him. While she was thinking of him, came Farzana.

“You’re looking disconcerted Are you worried about Ali?” she asked.

“Yes I haven’t had a word from him. I’m concerned about his safety.”

“At least, he should have made a call.”

“Yes that’s what worries me,” Mrs Naqvi noted.

“Do you remember which NGO he has joined? We can contact them.”

“Ali had shown me his appointment letter but I don’t remember the name of the NGO except that it’s based somewhere in the northern areas. I have already contacted all the NGOs working in that area but received the same reply: They don’t have any employee or trainee named Ali Naqvi. They even told me they haven’t made any recruitment from our city during last three months.”

“Then it’s really a cause for worry,” Farzana observed. “Have you checked with any of his friends?”

“He has no friend. His only friend was Sara. I even tried to contact her but was told she went abroad a month ago.”

“Ali is also missing for one month.”

“Do you think he has gone with Sara?”

“No. But I feel she has something to do with Ali’s disappearance.”

“But what possible reasons can be for this? Their marriage ended some six months ago,” Mrs Naqvi objected.

“But she came here just few days before Ali left. If you allow, may I ask father to find Ali’s whereabouts?”

“I had also considered reporting the matter to the police or seeking Javed Bhai’s help. But maybe Ali is too busy and involving the police in the matter will affect his job,” Mrs Naqvi observed.

“Too busy to even send you an SMS?”

“Actually there’s something I haven’t told you. Ali had been annoyed with me for quite some time.”

“Annoyed with you?” Farzana wondered. “I don’t believe it. You’re the only person he cares about.”

“Ali wanted to get some job but I wanted him to prepare for the civil service exam. So there was some exchange of words between us,” Mrs Naqvi decided not to disclose to Farzana the real reason her son was annoyed with her.

“Oh I see! In that case, you needn’t worry at least about his safety. I guess he’s still cross with you. You had better wait for his return.”

“Tell me do you still love Ali?” Mrs Naqvi asked Farzana looking deeply into her.

“Yes I do. But this doesn’t matter in the least. Still in his heart there’s no place for me.”

“My dear Ali is a shattered person. He has suffered so much, all for nothing. He is passing through the most difficult phase of his life and I think he wanted a job only as a means of escape from his predicament. But I know this wouldn’t help him. Ali’s real problem is that he has lost faith in the world and for having his faith restored he needs above all a companion who loves and cares about him and gives him the emotional support and trust he so badly needs,” Mrs Naqvi explained. “You are the only such person. So please help him.”

“For Ali I can do anything,” Farzana assured Mrs Naqvi. “Now I see some meaning in the breakdown of my own marriage and that of his as well. But I fear he’ll again reject my advances.”

“But at least you can try.”

“I’ll do my best.”

“Thanks.”

“**Thank God you’re** back. I was extremely worried about you. Were you ok?” Mrs Naqvi asked as she hugged Ali.

“Don’t I appear to be?” Ali replied in an off-hand manner.

“Of course you do but there wasn’t any word from you,” she complained.

“I’m sorry but I was very busy.”

Mrs Naqvi wanted to tell Ali that she had searched for him in all NGOs working in the northern areas but thought it wasn’t the opportune time.

“If you don’t mind, may I have some rest?” said Ali warily and without waiting for an answer went to his room. He was worn out by the journey and immediately went to sleep. When he woke up, it was late in the evening and he was feeling hungry. So he went out to ask his mother for the dinner. When he entered the living room, he saw Mrs Naqvi talking to Farzana.

“Good to see you back!” Farzana cheered at Ali, who didn’t reply and took a seat with his eyes cast down.

Mrs Naqvi had requested Farzana not to ask Ali about his whereabouts. So she desisted herself from doing so.”

“In your absence, Farzana had been very helpful to me,” Mrs Naqvi told Ali.

“May I have something to eat?” Ali ignored his mother’s remarks about Farzana.

“Oh yes! Dinner is almost ready. You two have a chat and I come back in a few minutes,” Mrs Naqvi said and left the room.

“Congratulation on your job and successful training.”

“Thanks,” Ali replied coldly.

“You still don’t feel for me?”

“Look Farzana, after all I have been through, there’s not a single soul I trust; and love is a matter of trust. If you want me to flirt with you, that may be possible. But beyond that I can’t do anything for you,” Ali told her plainly.

“I’m glad after all you have been through you’re still honest to the hilt. You could have easily flirted with me. I can understand that for anyone in your place it would be difficult to trust a woman. But not all women are alike. If one betrayed you, it doesn’t mean another will necessarily do the same. You

have got to repose trust in someone," Farzana said to Ali.

"Only to see it broken. Anyway I have embarked on a new career and I need to attend to that. You can wait for me if you want but only at your own risk," Ali replied bluntly.

"I can wait for you all my life but I understand your point."

Next evening Ali went to see Dr Junaid.

"Welcome back," the professor remarked. "How was your training?"

"Rather tough but very useful."

"Your mother would have been very concerned about you since you didn't make any contact with her. Did she ask you about that?"

"I don't care about her. No, she didn't ask about my whereabouts."

"Your training is over and now the job will start. From tomorrow, you will sit in one of our offices and will be paid a modest salary."

"What will I do there?"

"Given your qualifications and aptitude, we have decided to make you a member of our think tank. You will join its office and do the research that will be assigned to you."

"That's splendid! Research is my cup of tea."

"We know what a person is best suited for and assign him the work accordingly — justice, as Plato would call it. But remember we can assign you some other work that we think you are more suited for," Dr Junaid told Ali.

"I'll do whatever you ask me to do."

Ali joined the Jamia Islamia's research team. There wasn't much work to do and he could devote time to his studies. Since he had dropped the plan to appear in the civil service exam, he could study freely. And the first book he laid his hand on was the one that Dr Junaid had given him in one of their initial meetings. Ali found the book exceedingly instructive as well as interesting. In particular, he was struck by its philosophy that one should do one's duty irrespective of its reward and that in the pursuit of one's duty one

should stop at nothing.

Another three months passed. Mrs Naqvi never asked Ali where he had been trained and where he was working. But she was happy that he was settling down. Farzana would frequently visit them but couldn't elicit the desired response from Ali.

One day Dr Junaid called for Ali.

"Your work is going well but we want you to diversify your experience. Why don't you join a newspaper?"

"If you so desire," Ali assented.

"We can arrange a place for you in any media house but we would like you to do it yourself. Go to your late father's newspaper and meet the editor. I'm sure he'll give you a reporter's job."

Accordingly, Ali met the editor.

"I'm glad to give you a job. Your father was an excellent reporter and a great friend. But if I'm not wrong you wanted to join the civil service. So why journalism?" the editor asked.

"I have changed my mind. I don't want to be part of a corrupt and decadent system. Besides, journalism is far more enterprising. My father had set high standards of professionalism and I want to emulate them," Ali replied to the satisfaction of the editor.

"I appreciate you think like that. You're welcome to join our reporting team."

So Ali became a journalist. When his mother came to know of that, she expressed her pleasure. But at heart she was concerned lest her son should meet the fate of her husband. She had no idea that he was on a far more dangerous path.

Chapter 43

"There was another suicide attack in the city in which scores of people were killed.

"It's disgusting! I don't understand why these people are playing with innocent lives? Mrs Naqvi expressed her indignation as she watched the footage of the incident on TV.

"Terrorism is a protest against social injustices," Ali, who was also present there, remarked. "It will not end as long as these injustices perpetuate. Why doesn't anyone understand this?"

"You're trying to justify terrorism?" Mrs Naqvi was surprised at her son's remark.

"No, I'm only supplying an explanation of that," Ali responded.

"But do you think terrorism is the solution to social injustices?" she asked.

"I don't know. But these militants have this perception. All I can say is that our society is terminally ill and only a major surgery can save it," Ali maintained.

"And who will perform this surgery? "These terrorists who kill people in cold blood? No my son, evil can't be ended by a greater evil. Only good is an antidote to evil," Mrs Naqvi observed.

"But how can good possibly work in our system? The forces of the status quo embodied in our ruling class are too powerful to let the good defeat evil."

"Yes these forces are very powerful but no earthly power is greater than the people's power. Remember, a people have the government they deserve. Politics can't change for the better unless society improves itself. It's a long process but there are no short cuts to it. The people need to realize this and eventually they'll do so; though this will take time," Mrs Naqvi explained.

"Your approach, I'm sorry to say, is purely academic. Drastic changes need drastic steps. People who lose themselves in the maze of right and wrong end up doing nothing," Ali wasn't willing to give in.

"I'm disappointed that you think like that. If we don't know the distinction between the right and wrong, we'll only spell disaster as these misguided souls are doing in the name of religion or social justice. Ends never justify

means no matter how noble they are," Mrs Naqvi was equally adamant.

"But then what's your solution to these problems?" Ali asked. "I'm sure you'll not deny that gross injustices are endemic in our society."

"I don't deny that we have a most unjust society characterized by the extremes of wealth and poverty, luxury and misery, abundance and scarcity, and that our political and economic systems are the chief instruments of perpetuating these injustices. I also agree that poverty is the breeding ground of terrorism and that the militancy at least in some respect is a reaction against economic injustice. We have to change our politics and economics, because they make the rich richer and the poor poorer, the well-off better off and the miserable wretch, the powerful more powerful and the weak weaker. So the system has to go."

Mrs Naqvi paused for a while and then resumed: "Where I don't agree with you is the means by which the change is to be effected, the ills of society treated and its scars healed. Even if you kill at one go our entire elite class — the power-addict politicians, the corrupt bureaucrats, and the unscrupulous business tycoons — it wouldn't change anything for the better. Even worse people will take their place. There's an old saying 'don't hate the offender hate the offence'. By the same token, I would say don't attack the corrupt, unjust and tyrannical people; instead attack corruption, injustice and tyranny; attack their root causes. The forces of devastation and destruction, death and damnation can't salvage us," Mrs Naqvi said pointing at the footage of the blast.

"But who can salvage us?" Ali queried.

"Young, educated people like you." Who else? I have no hesitation in admitting that my generation was a failure but we have high hopes of you, because you are far more knowledgeable and well-informed and have greater understanding of your world. Only you need to be a bit more patient and rational."

"The young educated people find it difficult to get even a decent job. How can they change society?"

"By changing themselves," Mrs Naqvi replied. "The holy Quran says that God doesn't change the lot of a people unless they are committed to changing it themselves. Before pointing our finger at the system, we should ask ourselves where do we stand individually in our everyday life? Are we law abiding? Do we stop our vehicle at the red signal when no traffic constable is in sight? Do we pay taxes? Are we honest in the performance of our duties in

schools and hospitals, offices and factories? Do we honor our commitments? And are we really interested in justice? Or are we interested in justice only when we stand to gain by it? Yes, our elite class is rotten to the core but most of the rest of the people if put into their place would be as bad. No government can be better than its people," she spoke at length.

"**Maulvi Zia wants** to see you in the evening. Come to me and we'll go to him together."

Ali received the message from Dr Junaid.

It was five in the evening when Dr Junaid and Ali drove to Maulvi Zia's place.

"So this is your favorite student," Maulvi Zia remarked to Dr Junaid.

Ali was meeting the maulvi for the first time, though his face was familiar to him.

"Junaid is all praise for you and I know he's not generous in praising others," Zia continued looking keenly at Ali.

"In my case, he is too generous," Ali replied modestly.

"Ali has learnt a lot in a short span and now he is a most reliable member of our organization," Dr Junaid said.

"That's nice. It means we can give him any assignment and he'll carry it out. Am I right?" Zia looked at Ali.

"Yes sir you can count on me."

"You and I have at least two things in common: We both fell for the same woman and were deceived by the same woman," Maulvi Zia remarked. "But Sara is not just an ordinary woman; she represents our corrupt, fickle, worldly, irreligious and un-conscientious elite class, which looks down upon the rest of society as no more than a plaything. It's this class that is responsible for our problems and it's this very class that we need to bring to its knees. By the grace of God and thanks to the intelligence of senior people like Junaid and courage of young people like you, we'll be successful."

"You're right sir," Ali nodded.

In the meantime, the intercom rang up.

“Let him in,” Maulvi Zia told his secretary.

The door opened and to Ali’s surprise entered Babu Javed.

“I believe you two are familiar with each other,” Maulvi Zia chuckled.

“Yes of course,” Babu Javed, who knew Ali had joined Maulvi Zia’s organization, confirmed. “Congratulation. Now you’re on the right track,” he addressed Ali, who could see a sting in the remarks.
“Let me share it with you that Babu Javed also works for us,” Maulvi Zia said to a bewildered Ali. “It’s all in the family then. Let’s get down to business. Our movement has made the government desperate. First they tried to kill me and after they had failed they tried to put me behind the bars. But here they also failed. We believe that the sun is about to set on this evil system and its obnoxious upholders and we must ensure an early sunset. We have already increased the number of suicide attacks but we need to have high value targets. I believe Dr Junaid has some plans; so over to you Junaid.”

“The Eid is approaching and as usual there will be a big congregation in the historic Royal Mosque, which we have reports that prime minister and some other top guns will also attend. In the presence of such high value targets amid a large number of people, a blast will go a long way in serving our purpose,” Dr Junaid briefed others.

“But would it be possible to carry out the attack, because the level of security will be exceedingly high? Zia queried. “Though I must add that no level of security can be foolproof.”

“You’re right Maulvi sahib. Everyone going to the mosque will be thoroughly scanned so it will be well-neigh possible for the suicide bomber to make it. But, as always, some people will be loosely searched. I mean those who would be on duty there and these include media persons,” Dr Junaid explained.

“You mean to say that it will be less difficult for a journalist to carry out the attack on the Eid congregation.”

“Yes indeed.”

“But which journalist is brave and committed enough to carry out this noble act,” Maulvi Zia queried and then cast a long glance at Ali.

“I’ll do so,” Ali offered himself. “There’s no meaning and purpose in my life other than that you have given me. I’m completely alone. No mother, no father, no brother, no sister, no wife, no children, no friend, no relative, no roots, no identity. If I can be of any service to a great cause, I’ll feel my life hasn’t gone in vain.”

“We are your family and you are like a son to me. Nothing can make a man happier than the feeling that his son is going to lay down his life in the way of God. There can’t be a nobler death than that of a martyr,” Maulvi Zia remarked in a voice choked with emotions.

“So it’s settled that Ali will blast himself at the Eid congregation in the Royal Mosque. I’ll work out the details later,” Dr Junaid added.

“It was easier than we expected, Babu Javed remarked after Ali and Dr Junaid had left.”

“When a person is in our net, he can’t escape,” Maulvi Zia replied with a malignant smile. “This also takes care of your problem.”

“Yes indeed. My daughter is mad after him and as long as he’s alive, she’ll not have her peace of mind. Her marriage broke down only because of him,” Babu Javed said.

Chapter 44

"I'm really proud of you," Dr Junaid said to Ali on their way back. "You will be remembered as a great soldier of our cause."

Ali remained silent.

"Tell me anything I can do for you?"

"I'm almost at the end of my life. I don't need anything. But there's one question that has troubled me all my life. I want your answer to this question and I hope I'll get a frank answer," Ali returned.

"I appreciate your curiosity. What's your question?"

"Is there God?"

"I'll answer your question when we get back home."

On reaching home, Dr Junaid lit a cigarette and also offered Ali one.

"As in your case, this question has also troubled me a lot," he began. "Like you, I have oscillated between belief and doubt, faith and skepticism. The conclusion that I have reached is that in essence man-God relationship is subjective rather than objective, emotional rather than rational. When you believe in God, you believe in someone you have never seen and will never see. The belief in the unseen and the unknown can never be based on rational or empirical considerations. You can't establish the existence of God on the ground that since the world has a purpose, God must exist or that there must be a creator to account for the existence of the world, because there's no logical necessity that the world must have a purpose or a creator. Belief in God is then purely a matter of inner feeling. Just as you don't desire a thing because it's rational. On the contrary, you come up with reasons to justify your desires. By the same token, if you believe in God, you come up with all the reasons to justify your belief; and if you don't believe in God, you have several reasons in support of your agnosticism or atheism as the case may be."

"This stuff is very familiar to me. But you haven't answered my question, sir. Do you believe in God?"

"Why should it matter to you whether I believe in God or not? It's just a personal relationship much like whether I love someone or not. Yes, at times I'm an atheist, at times an agnostic and at times a staunch believer. For me

belief in God is just a state of mind, which goes on changing," Dr Junaid replied.

"One last question before I say good-bye to you. Do you think what I'm going to do is the right thing?" Ali asked looking deeply into his mentor.

"Yes. You must show to the world that you're not a non-entity or an insignificant being and that your will and your action matter."

One day before Eid, Ali's editor called him and asked him to cover the Eid congregation in the Royal Mosque.

"It's a very important event because the prime minister will be offering his prayers. Generally we assign such events to senior reporters but I have full confidence in you," he told Ali.

On the Eid day Ali woke up at dawn and after he had washed himself and dressed went down. A van was waiting for him. He got into the vehicle and was taken to a house outside the city. There he was given the suicide jacket. While in the academy, he had been taught how to use the suicide jacket. However, the man who handed him over the jacket also demonstrated how to use that. At eight in the morning, he was driven near the Royal Mosque. The security was high because of the prime minister's arrival. However, since Ali was wearing the press card, he wasn't searched. He went to the place reserved for journalists. The prime minister arrived and was straightaway escorted to the prayer hall.

"Should I blast myself?" Ali murmured to himself. "Yes I should. Why does a person live? Either because he loves life or fears death. Do I love life? One loves life when it's worth living. What's in my life that should make it worth living and worth loving? Failures and disappointments, dejections and disillusionments, emptiness and hollowness. All along I have lived on wrong premises and all along I have been taken for a ride. The people I loved and trusted used, abused, duped and ditched me. Who should I live for? I'm completely alone.

"Should I fear death? Why? Death will put an end to all that I have. And what I have? Nothing a person should be proud of or even satisfied with. My life has had no meaning, no purpose. Only in death it can assume any significance.

"Ok I have been treated badly and unfairly and life to me is no more than a futile passion. It had better come to an end. But why shouldn't I put an end to

my life only? Why should I kill scores of other people? These people haven't wronged me and I have nothing against them. To me, they are all innocent and taking one innocent life amounts to killing the entire humanity. No, I must not commit that mortal sin. Yes, if life has become unbearable for me and I want to terminate it, I should do so some other way.

"But it means my death will be as meaningless as my life; following my life, it'll signify only meek surrender and defeat. I have lived a non-entity, an insignificant being. Should I die like this as well? And who are these people present here? The representatives of the elite class or their slaves, who never think beyond themselves and care only for themselves. At least the militants live and die for a cause. Their lives have a meaning beyond themselves. Besides, I have myself accepted this task and it's my duty to carry it out. If it's my duty to kill myself and others, I should go ahead independent of its cost and consequences. These people are my enemies and I shouldn't love and spare my enemies."

"The prime minister is coming out of the prayer hall," a fellow journalist aroused Ali out of his contemplation and himself rushed towards the VVIP. In a while, Malik Naseem was surrounded by media persons eager to snap and question him.

"Has your government surrendered to terrorists?" One journalist asked the prime minister.

"No. We are committed to stamping out terrorism and God willing we'll do that," Malik Naseem replied forcefully.

"The son of a bitch is swearing by God and lying," Ali, who knew that militants were instrumental in bringing Malik Naseem to power, said to himself.

"It's widely believed that you have a soft corner for the militants and want to strike a deal with them," another media person queried.

"I strongly deny this. Such allegations are part of my character assassination being carried out by my opponents. In fact, my government has accomplished more in the fight against terrorism than my predecessor," the prime minister replied. "Ok, last question as shortly I am to fly to my home town."

"Sir in your view what is the most potent problem in the fight against terrorism?"

Malik Naseem thought for a while and then said, "Our young generation. I

mean the young people. Because they are impressionable, they fall an easy prey to the machinations of the masterminds of terrorism. You see most of the suicide bombers are the people between the age of fifteen and twenty-five. My message to our young generation is to be vigilant and not to fall into the trap of the militants. Yes, you have grievances against society and more so against the government. Yes, a large number of you remain deprived of jobs, education and a decent life. But these people at whose behest you are willing to take your life and that of others are in fact using you for their own nefarious designs." With those remarks, Malik Naseem made his way towards his limousine.

"Why is he not acting?" Maulvi Zia, who was watching the proceedings live on TV, said to Dr Junaid in desperation. "Have we betted on the wrong horse?"

"I'm surprised like you," Dr Junaid replied.

"What we're going to do now," Maulvi Zia remarked in vexation as Malik Naseem left the Royal Mosque safe and sound.

"I'm really disappointed," Dr Junaid said. "I knew Ali was indecisive but I had worked hard on him and I trusted he would deliver. I think we should give him an opportunity to explain what went wrong with him."

"Another opportunity! There's no such phrase in our dictionary and you know it. We'll just eliminate him," Maulvi Zia thundered.

"Please let me speak to him once and then you can do what you want," Dr Junaid implored.

"Junaid you know I never say 'no' to you. So for your sake I give Ali some time. But I trust you'll not put me to any further test."

Dr Junaid replied with a nod of the head.

"But where'll you meet him?"

"I know he'll get back to me. So I'm going home and will wait for him."

Dr Junaid didn't have to wait that long. In the afternoon, Ali came to see him. He didn't utter a word and stood motionless with his eyes cast down.

"You have let us down. What went wrong with you?" Dr Junaid asked in a sharp tone.

“I’m sorry sir but I couldn’t make up my mind. The killing of so many innocent people was too abhorrent for me to act.”

“But if that was so, why had you earlier consented to do that?”

Ali didn’t answer.

“You have spared others but your own life is still in peril.”

“I’m aware of that sir. I’m already at the point of no return. But I’ll tell you one thing. Like others, you were using me as a pawn on the chessboard of your ambitions. I’m done with you, as I’m done with the rest.”

With those words, Ali left the place in spite of Dr Junaid’s efforts to stop him.

Next morning all newspapers carried a single-column news: “A young journalist named Ali Naqvi was found dead outside his apartment. A few months back, his father, also a senior journalist, was killed outside his office and the killers remain at large. The investigators are wondering where there is any link between the death of the father and the son.”

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Thanks
Hussain Haider Zaidi